BIG DISCOUNTS ON GROCERIES P. 42

CARS WITH AMAZING NEW FEATURES

SAFETY ALERT FOR DARK CHOCOLATE P. 34

CR Consumer Reports®

FEBRUARY 2023

RATINGS & REVIEWS
- Big-Screen TVs
- Luxury Sedans
- Refrigerators
- Ranges
- Vacuums
- Treadmills

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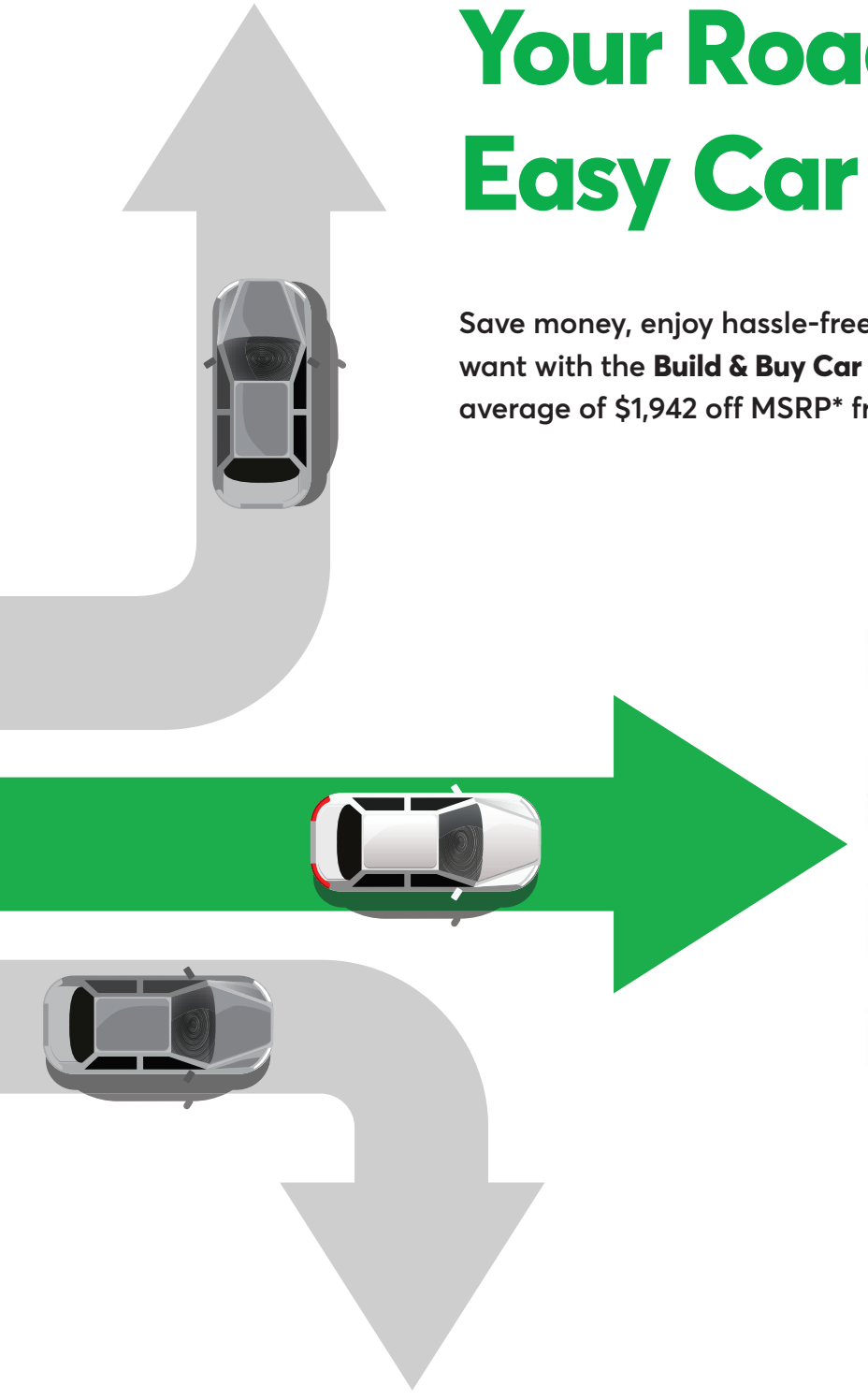

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CR

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Goals You Can Achieve

MANY OF US work hard to meet the ambitious goals we set for ourselves at the start of the new year, especially around health and wellness. Last year, I committed to regularly using my exercise bike, but I fell out of the habit. While CR can't keep you from breaking resolutions, we can help get you started toward smart and reasonable goals.

We often think we can sacrifice sleep despite overwhelming evidence of its powerful impact on our health. Life can get in the way—through anxiety about family issues or inflation tightening its grip. But sleep should be a priority, so we hope this issue can help you get the rest you need, with our experts' advice on pillows, mattresses, blackout shades, and humidifiers (see page 24). I have begun using a relaxation and breathing app to wind down. See what works and how your body responds.

Exercise has also been shown to help you meet your sleep—and overall health—goals, whether you do strength training, cardio, or a mix. It's important to find a routine that's both safe and something you'll continue, and experts recommend setting specific, manageable goals and finding activities you'll actually enjoy. The best fitness equipment matters, too, which is why we included the top cardio machines for you (see page 18).

And when you're finished with your workout, eat smart. CR won't recommend this year's fad diet, but we do help identify foods that are good for you—and some that may not be, including whether your favorite lettuce is being recalled and testing how some brands of dark chocolate bars contain a concerning amount of lead and cadmium (see page 34). So whether you're having a healthy salad or rewarding yourself with a treat, we want to help you make the best choice.

As you work toward your ambitions for this year—and as I dust off my exercise bike—CR is here to support you in meaningful ways.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
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PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Expanding Internet Access

High-speed internet service, or broadband, is a requirement of 21st-century American life. Seven in 10 of us agree it's "as important as water or electricity," according to a nationally representative May 2022 CR survey. Yet millions of Americans still struggle to access or afford broadband at home, and millions more lack a meaningful choice of providers.

CR has long urged policymakers and internet service providers (ISPs) to improve broadband access, affordability, and competition. Most recently, in an attempt to shed light on how much Americans actually pay for internet service—and exactly what they get for their money—we invited consumers to share their broadband bills with us. We then analyzed more than 22,000 of them. The effort demonstrated, among other things, that many broadband bills are extremely confusing, making it hard to compare prices when shopping for better options; that many bills are riddled with unexpected fees; and that communities with the least local broadband competition tend to pay the highest prices.

Our efforts to address these problems have begun to pay off. After encouragement from CR and other groups, the Federal Communications Commission in November adopted new rules requiring ISPs to display easy-to-read, nutrition-style labels wherever they promote their service—an important step toward a more transparent and competitive broadband market. To make the label most effective, however, it should appear on every monthly broadband bill. You can sign our petition in support of that enhancement at **CR.org/bblabel**.

42 MILLION

Americans lack access to broadband internet service.

Source: BroadbandNow (2021 estimate).

CALL TO ACTION

For decades, the Food and Drug Administration has been aware of multiple studies showing that FD&C Red No. 3 dye causes cancer in animals, and the agency banned its use in cosmetics more than 30 years ago. Yet it is still allowed in food, medicines, and supplements. In fact, the Environmental Working Group's food database lists more than 2,900 food products that contain it. We've joined with more than 20 advocacy groups demanding that the FDA ban Red No. 3 dye from anything your family ingests. You can add your voice at **CR.org/reddye3petition**.

Pushing for Stroller Safety

WHAT'S AT STAKE

When parents purchase a stroller, they reasonably assume it can safely transport their child. But in recent months, a number of parents took to social media to say their Mockingbird single-to-double strollers had snapped in half or collapsed with their kids aboard. In one case, a 4-year-old was thrown facedown into a busy New York City intersection.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

After hearing a handful of these reports, CR launched an investigation. Piecing together stories from social media, private messages, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission database, we determined that dozens of families had similar harrowing experiences. But when we contacted the company, it would acknowledge only "isolated incidents"—and didn't reveal how many incidents there had been.

On Oct. 28, we published our findings, and CR safety experts urged Mockingbird to recall the stroller. While the company said it was investigating, CR ramped up the pressure with additional coverage and a social media campaign, including a TikTok video showing a collapsed Mockingbird, which has garnered around 275,000 views.

On Nov. 10, the CPSC and the company announced a recall, citing reports of 138 cracked stroller frames and eight injuries, and advised consumers to stop using the strollers until they get a repair kit from the company.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about the recall at **CR.org/mockingbird**. Looking for a great stroller? Check out the top-rated models at **CR.org/strollerratings**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT MEDICARE
SAVE BIG ON HEATING BILLS
BEST TIRES FOR SLIPPERY ROADS
CR Consumer Reports
300+ PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED
OUR TOP PICKS OF 2022

Our December 2022 article **"What You Must Know About Medicare"** considered the pros and cons of Original Medicare and Advantage plans. Our readers shared their own experiences with these plans, too. To add your voice, go to **CR.org/medicareprocon**.

I APPRECIATED PENNY Wang's excellent article explaining and comparing Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans. It arms me with a clear tool to use when my associates ask about my Advantage plan. My wife and I live in a location with excellent healthcare providers and facilities. We have no need to go outside of our network providers. Therefore, we can afford to enjoy the benefits of an Advantage plan.
–Bill Kauffman, via CR.org

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

ANOTHER FACTOR TO consider when choosing between traditional Medicare and an Advantage plan that you didn't mention is portability. I travel five to six months of the year and don't want to deal with Advantage's networks and referral requirements when I'm away from home. So I chose traditional Medicare and can go anywhere at any place I happen to be when I need medical care. Very simple, very easy.
–Nancy Longworth, Indianapolis

I WANTED TO comment about Medicare Part D. A relative was getting a generic drug priced at $3 for a 90-day supply. During open enrollment she chose the next year's drug plan based on her list of medications. In January she went to get her prescriptions refilled and was charged over $400 for the same drug. When she complained to the insurer, they told her the drug had been "re-tiered" since open enrollment. The best they would offer was a one-time 30 percent discount. She discovered that while your enrollment commits you to an insurance company, that company is not bound in any way to honor the prices they provide to the government website. Buyer beware.
–Wayne Kraus, Marion, IA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Unfortunately, surprise charges are common at the start of each year. In addition to insurer changes in coverage for certain drugs–moving a medication to a higher tier, which can cost you a lot more–some plans have deductibles that must be met at the start of each year. These can catch people off guard and require them to fork over the full deductible before coverage kicks in. The best advice if you take any medications regularly is to shop each year during open enrollment to see how your current plan stacks up against new plans for the following year. And take advantage of free help offered by your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (877-839-2675) or the nonprofit Medicare Rights Center (800-333-4114).*

WINTER DRIVING SKILLS

REGARDING THE DECEMBER Road Report article "Sleet, Snow, Ice: How to Drive in Bad Weather," I would like to add: Never drive with your cruise control on!
–Kyle Nunn, Camarillo, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *You're absolutely right. Cruise control should never be used on wet, snowy, or icy roads. For example, during a heavy rain you might encounter puddles that cause hydroplaning. With cruise control activated, the car will try to maintain the same speed, and that could lead to loss of traction and control. By contrast, if your foot is on the gas pedal, chances are you'll adjust the pressure on the pedal if you find the road to be slick or icy.*

ANOTHER TIP IS to put the car in neutral when trying to slow down on slick surfaces. Obviously, this is recommended for slow-speed instances only. Growing up, our driveway was

gravel and there was a pretty steep hill at the end of it. Numerous times my vehicle would slide down the hill on snow or ice, but once I shifted the car into neutral, it would almost always come to a gradual stop.
–Dustin Petersen, Camp Point, IL

EDITOR'S NOTE *Neutral isn't a good choice for a moving car because the driver has less control over a vehicle that's totally subjected to the force of gravity. There are some rare exceptions regarding shifting a car with an automatic transmission into neutral while moving, such as in the case of unintended acceleration.*

TOP PICKS

IN YOUR DECEMBER article "CR's Top Picks," Paul Hope's "I Own This!" comment on the ease of clearing downed trees with a new chainsaw might encourage others to do the same. Chainsaws are dangerous, especially in the hands of inexperienced users. I used chainsaws for 50 years before taking my first safety course. I came away much wiser, and now have safety pants, steel-toed boots, a helmet, and new safety skills.
–Quentin Kessel, Mansfield, CT

EDITOR'S NOTE *Taking a safety course is a smart move. It's also important to choose a safe chainsaw. We test every model in our ratings for specific features like a cutting chain cover and noting kickback intensity, along with muffler placement on gas models to make sure there isn't the potential for a user to get burned. We also look for safety features such as a chain brake and metal bucking spikes. The former stops the chain immediately when you bump into a handguard (which could happen if the saw bucks). The latter provides more leverage, reducing the risk of kickback.*

THANK YOU FOR recommending the Avocado Green mattress. The only way the company could have improved this mattress was by sending someone to put the sheets on the bed. What a fabulous mattress and what great service!
–Janet Moynihan Englewood, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE *To see ratings of the Avocado Green and other mattresses, see "How to Get a Great Night's Sleep," on page 24.*

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LAPTOP SOFTWARE

I READ ABOUT the different costs for software in "Get a Great Laptop for Less." However, you left off one very important offering. Open Office duplicates most of the programs Microsoft sells. This suite of programs can also read Microsoft files, so there is no need to repeat the information. Easy to use and a big savings.
–Joe Ross, Nashua, NH

EDITOR'S NOTE *There are a handful of free office productivity suites that can replace a Microsoft 365 subscription. You mention Open Office (openoffice.org), compatible with Microsoft Office documents, which runs on most major platforms including Windows and macOS. There's also LibreOffice (libreoffice.org), which offers robust Office compatibility and is available for most major platforms. You might also consider Google's Workspace, from $6 per month, which works in a browser like Chrome, Firefox, and Safari.*

CARING FOR HOUSEPLANTS

Regarding your advice in the Ask Our Experts column: Instead of buying a humidifier, take a mug that organizations or friends have given you, fill it up with water, and put it next to the plant. Evaporation will take care of providing the right amount of humidity, and you can tell your friends, "Yes, I'm getting a lot of use out of your gift."
—Judythe Samter, Thayer, IN

EDITOR'S NOTE
A container of water nearby can provide extra humidity to plants during the dry-air heating season. Better yet, create a pebble tray. Just line a 1-inch-deep waterproof tray with small pebbles or gravel (gather some outside or buy them at a nursery or plant store), fill the tray with water, and set your plants on top of the pebbles. Keep the water level below the surface of the pebbles to prevent over-saturating the potting mix.

STORM SUPPLIES

A NOTE ON the "Winter Storm Prep Made Easy" section of "Stay Warm & Save Big on Heat This Winter": I have many LED solar path lights along my driveway and sidewalk. If the power goes out during a storm, I bring several inside. They stay lit for about 5 to 8 hours depending on how much sunlight they received. Also, having rechargeable LED flashlights will keep you from having to worry about buying batteries again. I also have an emergency AM/FM/NOAA crank radio. It can be recharged using a USB cable, by cranking it, and also by its built-in solar panel. It has a flashlight, reading lamp, SOS siren, and ports to charge other devices.
–Monica Muller, Chesterfield, VA

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Garbage Disposals

WE TESTED: 44 models
WE TEST FOR: The speed of grinding scraps, how finely scraps were ground down, and noise level during use.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 55
Range: 28-81

BEST CONTINUOUS-FEED
Frigidaire FF13DISPC1
$175

81 OVERALL SCORE

BEST BATCH-FEED
InSinkErator Evolution Cover Control Plus
$320

80 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET CONTINUOUS-FEED FOR LESS
Everbilt US-10-EB1250-PC
$135

80 OVERALL SCORE

Top-Freezer Refrigerators

WE TESTED: 40 models
WE TEST FOR: Thermostat control; temperature uniformity; energy efficiency; ease of use, including storage; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 64
Range: 40-83

NICELY ORGANIZED (29")
Samsung RT18M6215SG
$930

83 OVERALL SCORE

SLIM FOR SMALL KITCHENS (24")
Whirlpool WRT112CZJZ
$530

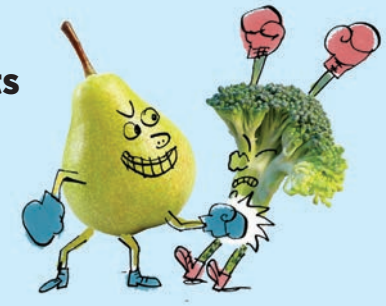
81 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE CAPACITY BUT NOT AS QUIET (33")
LG LRTLS2403S
$1,050

80 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Can I store fruits and vegetables in the same fridge drawer?



WE DON'T RECOMMEND IT. Some produce, including fruits such as pears, give off ethylene gases that make ethylene-sensitive produce, like broccoli, spoil faster if kept nearby. In fact, many fridges have "crisper drawers" that are designed to keep fruits and vegetables separated, and in a special environment that will keep them fresher longer. In general, fruit lasts longer in low-humidity conditions, while many vegetables last longer in high humidity. Some fridges, like the LG above, let you control these environments via vents on each drawer: For fruits, the vent should be more open to allow for greater airflow; for vegetables, the vent should be more closed for higher humidity.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Canister Vacuums

WE TESTED: 16 models
WE TEST FOR: How well each model cleans carpets and bare floors, including picking up pet hair; how easy it is to push, pull, and carry the vacuum; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 74
Range: 53-84

TOP PICK & RELIABLE BRAND (BAGGED)
Miele Complete C3 Marin
$1,300

84 OVERALL SCORE

SMART BUY FOR PET OWNERS (BAGGED)
Kenmore Pop-N-Go BC4026
$320

76 OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTWEIGHT FOR EASY CARRYING (BAGLESS)
Miele Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog
$940

76 OVERALL SCORE

Porcelain Tile Flooring

WE TESTED: 6 models
WE TEST FOR: Whether the flooring resists stains, dents, scratches, and fading from UV rays; how slippery the flooring is when wet; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 85
Range: 56-90

DURABLE ALL-AROUND CHOICE
Style Selections (Lowe's) Natural Timber Ash 553878
$4 per square foot

90 OVERALL SCORE

RESISTS DENTS
Marazzi Montagna Dapple Gray ULM7 (Home Depot)
$2 per square foot

89 OVERALL SCORE

RESISTS STAINS & NOT SLIPPERY
LL Flooring Cabrillo Gray 10048478
$2 per square foot

81 OVERALL SCORE

Wireless Routers Under $100

WE TESTED: 13 models
WE TEST FOR: The internet speed ("throughput") from 8 to 55 feet away from the router, how easy the router is to set up, how well it protects your privacy, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 74
Range: 44-84

BEST DATA PRIVACY CONTROLS
Linksys AX1800 (E7350)
$80

84 OVERALL SCORE

EXCELLENT SPEED EVEN AT FAR DISTANCES
TP-Link Archer AX1800
$80

80 OVERALL SCORE

MOST BUDGET-FRIENDLY
Asus AC1750 (RT-AC65)
$60

77 OVERALL SCORE

Cordless Drills

WE TESTED: 16 general-use models (typically 12 volts)
WE TEST FOR: How fast a drill can make holes and drive screws, how much work it can do on a single charge, its noise level, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 33-86

LONG RUN TIME
Milwaukee 2503-22
$170

86 OVERALL SCORE

POWERFUL & QUIET
DeWalt DCD701F2
$150

74 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
Skil DL529002
$75

71 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with those of another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Laptops & More

Should I warm up my car's engine for a while before I drive on a cold day?

YES. GIVING THE ENGINE a chance to run before you head out on a wintry day is a good idea because it gives the oil pump a chance to circulate oil through your car's engine and lubricate all the moving parts, according to John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. Doing this (plus good regular maintenance) can help keep your vehicle running past the 200,000-mile mark.

You don't have to warm up the engine for more than a minute: Most cars take only a few seconds for the oil to lubricate the engine. So you should be good to go once you've settled into your seat, buckled up, and defogged the windshield.

You may be tempted to keep your car idling for longer than that to get the heat flowing in the cabin (which can take around 15 minutes). But the fastest way to get your car's interior to a comfortable temperature is to start driving. The engine heats up more quickly when you're in motion. (And you won't be using gas needlessly.)

No matter what the weather is like, don't rev your engine for the first few minutes of driving. Pushing a car too quickly after ignition is tough on your engine and can shorten its life span.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

Is it okay to use an expired at-home COVID-19 test?

Even if the expiration date printed on the package of your rapid antigen test has come and gone, don't toss it just yet. The Food and Drug Administration has extended the expiration dates for many tests, which means you may still be able to use yours.

The initial at-home tests were given fairly short expiration-date windows. That's because regulators were trying to get them out to consumers as quickly as possible and weren't certain how long the tests would remain accurate. But now, many manufacturers have completed long-term studies of their tests, and, as a result, the FDA has extended the expiration by several months past the printed date for some of those tests.

To find out whether the test you purchased has had its expiration date extended, go to FDA.gov and search for "covid test expiration date." You'll find a page with a list of tests by brand and, in a separate table, by lot number, detailing whether the expiration date listed on the package has been extended–and for how long.

If your test is expired and not on that list (or if the extended expiration date has passed), it's possible that it might not be accurate. Get a new test instead: If you have Medicare Part B or private health insurance, you can get up to eight at-home tests per month reimbursed by your insurer, often with no up-front cost.

I want to monitor my heart rate and count my steps every day. Should I use a fitness tracker, or is a smartwatch more accurate?

When it comes to basic activity monitoring, such as counting steps and measuring your heart rate, our lab testing shows that the top-rated fitness trackers are just as accurate as the top-rated smartwatches. In fact, certain fitness trackers can actually be more accurate than some smartwatches: The $100 Fitbit Luxe (shown below) earns an Excellent rating in our test for step-count accuracy, while the $450 Apple Watch Series 7 receives only a Good rating.

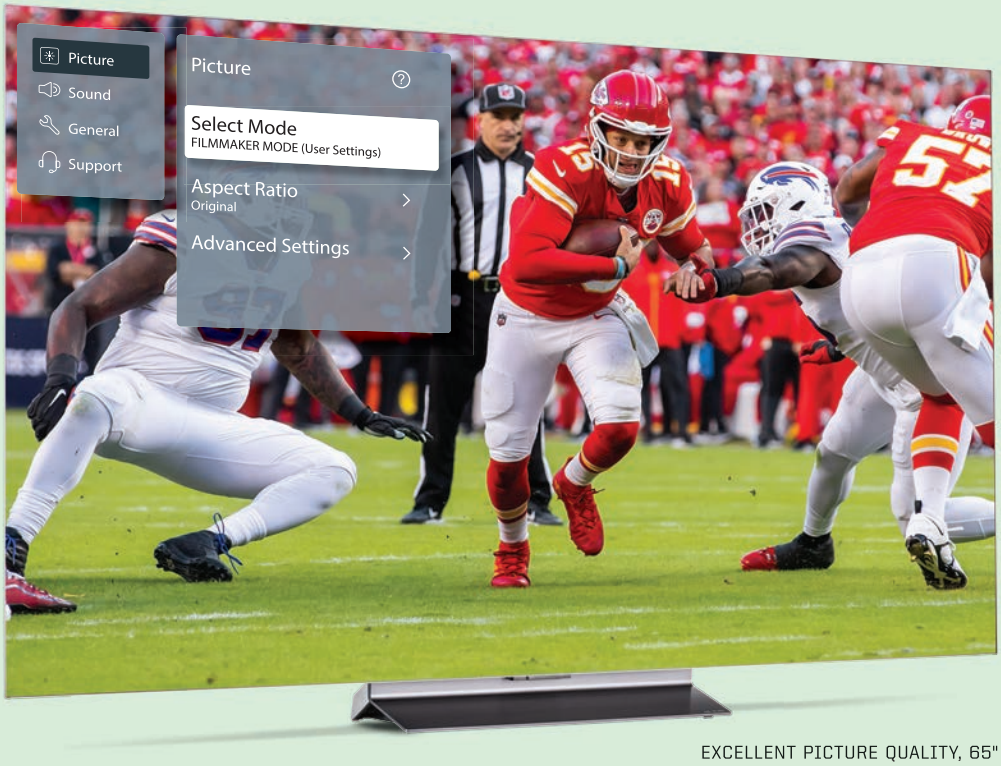
Certain fitness trackers can (like most smartwatches) track your sleep habits–and they typically run much longer on a single charge than smartwatches do. That's great news if you simply want to keep tabs on your daily activity levels and your nightly zzz's, because most fitness trackers in our ratings cost between $30 and $150, while many smartwatches cost between $200 and $400, and some go as high as $750.

But if you're looking for more sophisticated types of health monitoring, a smartwatch may be a better bet. Some can measure body fat and gauge your stress level–and will even guide you through workouts or count how many reps you complete for certain exercises, such as sit-ups. Smartwatches usually feature built-in GPS and let you download a variety of apps like Medisafe, a popular medication reminder.

To learn more about CR's top-tested fitness trackers and smartwatches, go to **CR.org/wearables**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

CR Insights



EXCELLENT PICTURE QUALITY, 65"

LG OLED65C2PUA
$1,700

85 OVERALL SCORE

IN THE KNOW

Optimize Your TV Settings

WHEN YOU BUY a new TV, the factory settings may be all wrong for the room you're putting it in. Your screen's brightness may be too dim for the lighting there, and/or the colors may not be saturated enough. The good news is that it's easy to fine-tune the settings to get the best possible picture and sound.

CHOOSE THE BEST MODE

Go to Picture, in Settings. Even if you're watching the Super Bowl, avoid "sports" mode: It can over-boost brightness, contrast, and colors, and turn on "motion smoothing," which can make an NFL game look like a home video. Instead, try "filmmaker mode," "natural," and "movie," which generally provide better viewing.

SEE MORE DETAIL

If you can't always make out what's happening in darker scenes, adjust the brightness level (also called black level). First, hit pause on a dark scene, go to Settings, and turn the brightness level up until you can see all of the details. Then turn it back down gradually until you reach a balance, keeping it as dark as possible without obscuring details.

ENHANCE THE SOUND

It can be tricky to hear fast-paced dialogue or thick accents (think "Derry Girls"). Some TVs have an enhanced dialogue setting—often called "speech boost"—which, when turned on, can help you hear conversations more clearly. Another solution is to turn on closed captioning—usually labeled "CC" in Settings.

65-INCH TVs FOR $1,000 OR LESS

71 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung QN65Q70A
$950

68 OVERALL SCORE

Hisense 65U8H
$900

64 OVERALL SCORE

TCL 65R635
$998

CR members can also consult our exclusive TV Screen Optimizer, at CR.org/TVoptimizer, which provides more specific settings for thousands of individual television models.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS; ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

WINTER SMARTS

Top Picks This Month

February can be pretty cold in many parts of the U.S., so it's a good time to find more ways to stay warm—indoors and out. These six clever ideas, uncovered by CR staffers, will help you do just that.

Natalie van der Meer
Deputy Editor

I OWN THIS!

SIP IN STYLE

Fellow Joey Double-Wall Ceramic 8 0z. Mug $25 each

These copper-bottom ceramic cups have a nice weight to them, making them satisfying to hold while drinking something warming. Plus, their small size will retain the heat of your drink well.

STOP SLIDING

Stabilicers Maxx2 Cleats $70

"After some near-falls on black ice, I bought ice cleats," says CR's Ginger Cowles, who led our evaluation of five pairs. These Stabilicers offer great grip and easily attach to shoes with Velcro straps.

KEEP HANDS TOASTY

Swany Arctic Mittens $95 for Womens and Mens

These insulated mittens with leather palms keep fingers super-warm. The best part? They unzip to reveal touchscreen-compatible inner gloves—ideal for when you use your phone outside.

HEAT UP YOUR ROOM

Comfort Zone CZ499R Space Heater $69

Here's a budget-friendly space heater that can warm a mid-sized room (about 200 square feet). It weighs 6.4 pounds, so it's easy to move, and includes a remote and has a tip-over safety switch.

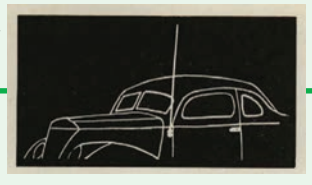
A HOTTER COCOA

La Monarca Mexican Hot Chocolate $8

CR's Angela Lashbrook, who led our taste test of six hot chocolates, says "this is the mix I'll reach for this winter." It delivers full-bodied chocolate flavor with a delightful cinnamon twist.

PHOTOS, BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; JACK TEETOR; CONSUMER REPORTS; GM; CONSUMER REPORTS; TESLA; HONDA

CR Time Traveler AUTO INNOVATIONS



1937 Car radios are controversial because they may distract drivers, CR reports. We say use them if you like, but advise turning to music, which requires little attention.

1945 Engineer Ralph Teetor invents cruise control so that you can drive at a specific speed without your foot on the accelerator.

1956 CR calls for mandatory seat belts in cars. Of the 39 belts we test, 13 meet minimum standards; many others fail.

1964 The Pontiac GTO, shown below, helps launch the "muscle car" era, with a potent 325-hp V8 engine.

1979 For the first time, tires receive quality grades molded into the sidewall rubber. Reading these will help consumers select safer and better-performing tires, CR explains.

POOR EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED

A WARMER COAT

Patagonia Women's Downdrift Jacket $329

"I did a lot of research before buying this Patagonia puffer—and it kept me warm all last winter." Filled with natural duck and goose down, it has a removable insulated hood and deep front pockets.

I OWN THIS!

Angela Lashbrook
Deputy Editor, Home

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH. PHOTOS, BOTH PAGES, LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

Ask Our Experts

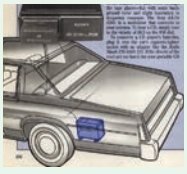
Is synthetic 'down' just as warm as the real thing?

OUNCE FOR OUNCE, natural down is warmer than synthetic. It also holds up longer, so you can stay warm for years to come. A synthetic down coat, on the other hand, needs to be more densely packed with fibers to produce the same level of warmth as natural down. But it's also vegan-friendly, water-resistant or waterproof, and less expensive.

To buy a truly warm faux down coat, pay attention to weight ratings, which typically range from 40 to 140 grams. The heavier the jacket, the more insulation–and warmth–it will provide. And while a synthetic down coat is usually less expensive than a natural down one, experts say that it needs to be replaced more often because the material doesn't retain its "loft" as well as real feathers do: When synthetic fibers compress, they don't fluff back up easily. (Natural down has tiny little ridges along each filament that act like hooks, allowing the down to cluster together, fluff back up, and trap air again and again.)

But synthetic down has an advantage over real down: It handles very wet weather better. If natural down gets wet, it clumps together and has trouble regaining its loft. If you still prefer a natural down jacket, look for one that's labeled water-repellent or water-resistant (like the Patagonia coat at left).

1981 The Honda Accord's Electro Gyrocator, claimed to be the first commercially available car navigation system, is introduced.



1991 In-car CD players with multi-disc changers stowed in the trunk are the latest trend. The Sony XR-7280 earns our top rating.

2010 CR test drives electric vehicle (EV) prototypes. The all-electric Mini-E is quick, smooth, and quiet, but with a limited mile range.

2015 The falcon-wing rear doors on the new Tesla Model X elevate SUV design to lofty heights–and allow for easy access, we say. But auto reliability proves to be an issue.

2023 Our experts share innovative car features like automatic high beams, which switch to low when oncoming cars approach. They're offered even on basic cars like this Honda HR-V.

2023 Honda HR-V
$23,800-$29,400

73
OVERALL SCORE

For the latest car features we love (and some we don't), turn to page 50.

DREAMING OF A kitchen stove that's worthy of Ina Garten or Bobby Flay? Pro-style ranges, which are designed to offer a restaurant-kitchen experience, promise just that: They tend to have luxe touches, like large knobs, and heavy continuous cast-iron cooking grates.

Some pro-style ranges are also larger than standard 30-inch ranges, offering 36-inch widths with more burners: six instead of four or five.

In our tests, pro ranges like the CR Recommended Monogram and Kucht models, below, offer precise cooktop controls and deliver quality bakes. But some pro ranges don't offer a five-star performance. Several models struggled in our baking tests, and some have poor predicted reliability–disappointing given their high prices. Look for a range, below, with both a higher rating and at least a Good rating for predicted reliability.

30-INCH

79 OVERALL SCORE

Monogram ZGP304NTSS $5,600

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 5/5 BAKING

68 OVERALL SCORE

KitchenAid KFDC500JSS $5,200

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 4/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 4/5 BAKING

60 OVERALL SCORE

Wolf GR304 $5,430

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 3/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 2/5 BAKING

52 OVERALL SCORE

Thermador Pro Harmony PRG305WH $4,950

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 3/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 4/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 2/5 BAKING

49 OVERALL SCORE

Viking VGIC53024BSS $5,700

- 1/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 3/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 3/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 2/5 BAKING

42 OVERALL SCORE

KitchenAid KFGC500JPA $4,410

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 3/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 4/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 4/5 BAKING

36-INCH

69 OVERALL SCORE

Kucht Professional KRG3618U $3,200

- N/A PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 4/5 BAKING

65 OVERALL SCORE

Electrolux ECFD3668AS $6,000

- 2/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 3/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 4/5 BAKING

58 OVERALL SCORE

Viking VGR5366BSS $9,240

- 1/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 3/5 BAKING

54 OVERALL SCORE

JennAir JGRP436HL $6,700

- 3/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 5/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 4/5 BAKING

THREE TO SKIP

38 OVERALL SCORE

Bosch HGS8055UC *30-inch* $3,700

- 4/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 3/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 1/5 BAKING

38 OVERALL SCORE

Miele HR 1142 G *30-inch* $6,200

- 2/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 3/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 1/5 BAKING

33 OVERALL SCORE

Fisher & Paykel OR30SCG4X1 *30-inch* $4,700

- 2/5 PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- 4/5 COOKTOP HIGH
- 1/5 COOKTOP LOW
- 1/5 BAKING

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODGRIO DAMATI. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

For our full ratings, Digital and All Access members can go to CR.org/ranges.

TECH UPDATE

Protect Your Phone From Damage

DROPPED YOUR PHONE AGAIN? You're not alone. A 2022 survey conducted by Secure Data Recovery Services found that 44 percent of Americans surveyed fumble their phones at least once a week. The good news: Most new smartphones are built to survive a few hits. "But with premium phones costing $800 to $1,500, it's smart to take basic precautions," says Rich Fisco, head of electronics testing at CR. Here are answers to your most pressing phone-protection questions.

› **Should I put a case on it?** Yes. In our labs, we intentionally drop smartphones without cases on and they do get beat up quickly–and some break. "But when we added cases to a few of those phones, none cracked," Fisco says.

› **Which cases work best?** Look for cases with a raised edge around the screen to protect the glass from a face-down drop. Also look for raised edges around the rear camera to protect the lenses. Some cases may also promote their ability to prevent stress ripples from cracking the glass and frame during a drop. We also like textured or soft-touch cases, like the Incipio, at right, for a little extra grip.

› **Do I also need a screen protector?** It's not a must, but if you're prone to scratching or cracking your screen, you can use one of these clear barriers that adheres to your screen as an extra safety net. A 3-pack of protectors costs about $20–much cheaper than a screen repair ($200 to $400). But screen protectors can get dinged up quickly, so you may want to replace them frequently.

› **What if I drop my phone in water with the case on?** A standard case won't protect your phone against water damage. However, most smartphones now offer enough water resistance to survive a dip in the toilet. If your phone does get wet, remove the case, wipe the phone with a soft, lint-free cloth, and tap it gently to release any excess liquid. Let the phone dry for at least 5 hours before using it or plugging it in.

2 CASES WORTH TRYING

Incipio Duo
$28 and up

This soft-touch case has an impact-absorbing layer inside to help the phone survive 12-foot drops.

OtterBox Symmetry Series Case
$50

Made of hard plastic, this case has raised edges to protect the rear camera and screen from scratches.

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; INCIPIO; OTTERBOX; JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS; BMW

THE BETTER DEAL

LUXURY SEDANS

HIGHER PRICE
$54,800 - $79,900

✓ **BMW 5 Series**
$65,210*
83 OVERALL SCORE

BETTER PRICE
$49,500 - $65,250

✓ **Genesis G80**
$52,650**
84 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

LUXURY SEDANS are designed to pamper and entertain—and these two midsized models are the finest in the category. The BMW and the Genesis both come with turbocharged four-cylinder engines, all-wheel drive, and leather-upholstered seats. The BMW has a slightly higher road-test score, but the Genesis has a better predicted reliability score and costs less, making it the better value.

*Price as tested.
**Comparably equipped.

POOR — EXCELLENT | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

FOOD IQ™

Try These Better Butters

SHOPPING FOR BUTTER has gotten complicated: Supermarkets used to carry salted or unsalted versions. Now labels tout "European style," "cultured," and "grass-fed" butters. Which should you buy—especially when the average pound of butter costs $4.85, and some premium brands are charging $11 per pound?

To find out which taste best, our staffers bought 11 butters from well-known brands like Cabot, Kerrygold, and Land O'Lakes—as well as some less-known ones, such as Finlandia and Isigny Ste Mère. We blind-tasted the unsalted and salted versions of each, evaluating them for color, aroma, texture, and flavor. CR writer and recipe developer Perry Santanachote also baked with the unsalted butters to see which made the most buttery, moist pound cake. Whether you use butter for baking or enjoy spreading it on your morning toast, our favorites, below, are worth a try.

TASTERS' FAVORITE

Finlandia
(Salted & Unsalted)
$11.58

This butter from grass-fed cows is silky with a glossy sheen and spreads nicely on bread, but doesn't melt too quickly into it. "If you want to upgrade your everyday butter, give this one a try," says CR writer and trained chef Paul Hope. The unsalted version has a natural, well-rounded flavor with no aftertaste.

FIRST RUNNER-UP

Isigny Ste Mère
(Unsalted)
$11.44

The unsalted Isigny Ste Mère is excellent and similarly priced to our Tasters' Favorite. It's sourced from pasture-fed cows and is cultured (made with live bacterial cultures). The texture is smooth, and the butter tastes a bit grassy. Skip the salted version, which is way too salty.

SECOND RUNNER-UP

Kerrygold
(Salted)
$11.98

Kerrygold, which also comes from grass-fed cows, has a flavor and texture that's similar to the salted Finlandia. A deep-yellow butter with a natural aroma, Kerrygold has a nice level of saltiness and is super-spreadable. The unsalted version has some off-flavors our staffers didn't like.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY PICK

Breakstone's
(Salted & Unsalted)
$5.99

This butter isn't going to blow your mind, but it won't break the bank either. It has a balanced, buttery aroma and a nice cream flavor. The unsalted version is smooth and nicely coats bread, says CR food editor Trisha Calvo. The salted version tasted better than other less expensive ones we tried.

BAKING FAVORITE

Land O'Lakes
(Unsalted)
$6.79

The pound cake made with Land O'Lakes unsalted butter had a moist crumb and buttery aroma. The butter is also easy to cut—ideal for making pie dough or biscuits. We don't suggest this brand (unsalted or salted) as a table butter: It's a bit greasy and can be tougher to spread.

PHOTO: PERRY SANTANACHOTE/CONSUMER REPORTS

Note: Butter prices are per pound.

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

CADILLAC, CHEVROLET, AND GMC SUVs

GMC is recalling 338,735 2021 Cadillac Escalade and Escalade ESV, Chevrolet Suburban and Tahoe, and GMC Yukon and Yukon XL SUVs because their daytime running lights (DRLs) may not turn off when the headlights are on, which is against federal motor vehicle safety standards. If the DRLs do not deactivate when the headlamps are on, the resulting glare could increase the risk of a crash. **What to do:** Dealerships will update software to correct the condition, free of charge. The automakers will notify owners of affected vehicles by mail. Owners may also call Cadillac at 800-458-8006, Chevrolet at 800-222-1020, or GMC at 888-988-7267. NHTSA's campaign number is 22V827, and GM's own number for this recall is N222382220.

MOCKINGBIRD STROLLERS

Mockingbird is recalling about 149,000 Single-to-Double strollers because the lower side of the stroller frame can crack, posing a fall risk to children in the stroller. The strollers were sold at Target stores nationwide and online at hellomockingbird.com, babylist.com, goodbuygear.com, and target.com from March 2020 to September 2022 for $395 to $450. **What to do:** Stop using the stroller. Call 877-274-3240 or go to hellomockingbird.com for details and to receive a free frame reinforcement kit.

BLACK+DECKER GARMENT STEAMERS

Empower Brands is recalling about 518,500 Black+Decker Model HGS011 Easy Garment Steamers because the steamers can expel, spray, or leak hot water during use, posing a burn hazard. The steamers were sold at Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, Walmart, and other stores nationwide, and online at bedbathandbeyond.com, blackanddeckerappliances.com, target.com, and walmart.com from June 2021 through September 2022 for $16 to $23. **What to do:** Stop using the steamer. Call Empower Brands at 800-990-5298 or go to blackanddeckerappliances.com for details and to receive a free replacement part for the steamer.

GENERAC GENERATORS

Generac is recalling about 321,160 Generac and DR 6,500-watt and 8,000-watt portable generators because an unlocked handle can pinch consumers' fingers against the generator frame when the generator is moved, posing finger amputation and crushing hazards. (These portable generators were also previously recalled in July 2021.) The generators were sold at major home improvement and hardware stores nationwide, and online from June 2013 through June 2021 for $790 to $1,480. **What to do:** Stop using the generator, unless the locking pin has been inserted to secure the handle in place before and after moving the unit. Call Generac at 844-242-3493 or go to generac.com for details and to get a free repair kit. Customers who responded to the original recall will automatically be sent a new kit.

HORIZON TREADMILLS

Johnson Health Tech Trading is recalling about 192,000 Horizon T101-05 treadmills because the treadmill can unexpectedly accelerate, change speed, or stop without user input, posing a fall hazard. The treadmills were sold at Dick's Sporting Goods and Johnson Fitness & Wellness stores nationwide, and online at Amazon, dickssportinggoods.com, horizonfitness.com, and johnsonfitness.com from March 2018 through October 2022 for $600 to $1,000. **What to do:** Stop using the treadmill. Call Horizon Fitness at 888-223-1045 or go to horizonfitness.com/support/recall for details and to receive a free USB with a software repair that you can install.

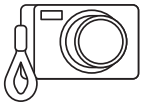
CLARKS CANVAS SHOES

Clarks Americas is recalling about 113,000 Breeze Ave, Breeze Shore, and Breeze Step women's shoes in navy colors because prolonged and direct contact with the shoes' upper material can expose the wearer to the chemicals benzidine and/or dimethoxybenzidine, which are toxic and can cause adverse health effects. The shoes were sold at Clarks outlet stores and other retailers, including DSW, Kohl's, Macy's, QVC, and Zappos, and online at Amazon and clarksusa.com from February 2022 to October 2022 for about $65. **What to do:** Stop wearing the shoes. Call 800-480-5092 or go to clarksusa.com for details and to get a full refund. You may return the shoes to the store where you purchased them or Clarks will send you free shipping materials and a prepaid return shipping label.

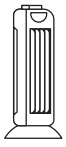
FEBRUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

MATTRESSES

CAMERAS



SPACE HEATERS



SNOW BLOWERS

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Best Exercise Machines From Our Tests

Check out CR's top picks and get expert advice to help you decide if a treadmill, a bike, or an elliptical is right for you.

by Kevin Loria

TOP-RATED TREADMILL

PELOTON TREAD $3,500

88 OVERALL SCORE

WHETHER YOU'RE looking for a new way to exercise at the gym or shopping for equipment to use at home, a few considerations can help you find a machine that will keep you in shape, even when it's cold outside. Do you have physical issues—say, balance problems—that might make an exercise bike a safer, more user-friendly option than a treadmill? Do you want to strengthen your arms and legs at the same time, the way you can on an elliptical with moving handlebars?

If you're wondering which will boost your fitness level more, the truth is that almost any cardio machine can provide a great workout, says Sabrena Jo, senior director of science and research at the American Council on Exercise (ACE). But no matter the machine, opt for one that you can use without discomfort and that fits your goals, whether it's getting some aerobic exercise, helping your body recover from an injury, or training for a fitness event. To help you decide, here are the benefits and drawbacks of the popular machines CR rates.

Treadmills

BENEFITS: A treadmill can help you get and stay fit all year-round, especially if walking or running is your preferred form of exercise. And it's clearly the best option if you're training for a race, says Michael Rogers, PhD, a professor and department chair of human performance studies and the research director for the Center for Physical Activity and Aging at Wichita State University in Kansas.

Running on a treadmill can help you get a workout in quickly. But walking on one can be good exercise, too, and help you stick with a regular walking routine—especially if inclement weather sometimes gets in the way of outdoor activity.

DRAWBACKS: One downside of a treadmill is that running on one is a relatively high-impact activity, harder on joints than workouts on any other common cardio machine. That means treadmill running isn't a great choice if you have ankle, back, or knee issues, Rogers says. Walking on a treadmill is usually fine for most people. And doing so on a slight incline may actually put less stress on the knees than a totally flat setting, research suggests.

Shopping for a home machine? Treadmills can take up a lot of space compared with most other cardio machines, says Paula Papanek, PhD, founding director of the exercise science program in the department of physical therapy at Marquette University in Milwaukee. And folding treadmills often require almost as much room as nonfolding models. Treadmills also tend to make a lot of noise, which can sometimes be a problem, especially for people who live in apartments, says John Galeotafiore, associate director of product testing at Consumer Reports.

BEFORE YOU BUY: If you haven't spent much time on a treadmill, adjust the speed and incline manually before trying any automatic programs to help you get used to its movement. And familiarize yourself with proper use. (See "Stay Safe on a Treadmill," on page 21.)

Exercise Bikes

BENEFITS: Exercise bikes are versatile. They can provide very intense workouts for those who want them or be used at much lower intensities for people just getting started and those recovering from an injury. Because exercise

ILLUSTRATION, FACING PAGE: SINELAB

bikes offer low-impact workouts, they're much better for people who have knee problems than, say, a treadmill, Rogers says.

If you like cycling outside, an exercise bike can help you stay active when the weather isn't ideal. And many newer machines—called studio bikes—closely mirror the experience of road bikes. (All bikes in our ratings fit this mold.) Many studio bikes also connect to entertaining classes or group workouts, which can help motivate you as you ride, Rogers says.

Exercise bikes can be more compact than other cardio machines, so they may be a better fit for smaller spaces, Papanek says. Some can even be stowed in a closet.

DRAWBACKS: People with back pain may have a hard time with bikes that force them to lean forward. In this case, a bike that allows you to stay more upright may be better. People with more serious back problems or poor balance may want to consider a recumbent bike, which allows you to pedal from a reclined position and stay close to the ground.

BEFORE YOU BUY: Rogers says that making sure you have the right fit on an exercise bike is important. You'll want to check that when the pedal is down, your leg is almost fully extended. To get a sense of a bike's comfort, pay special attention to the adjustability score in our ratings, which reflects the ability to adjust the handlebar height, seat height, and seat position.

Ellipticals

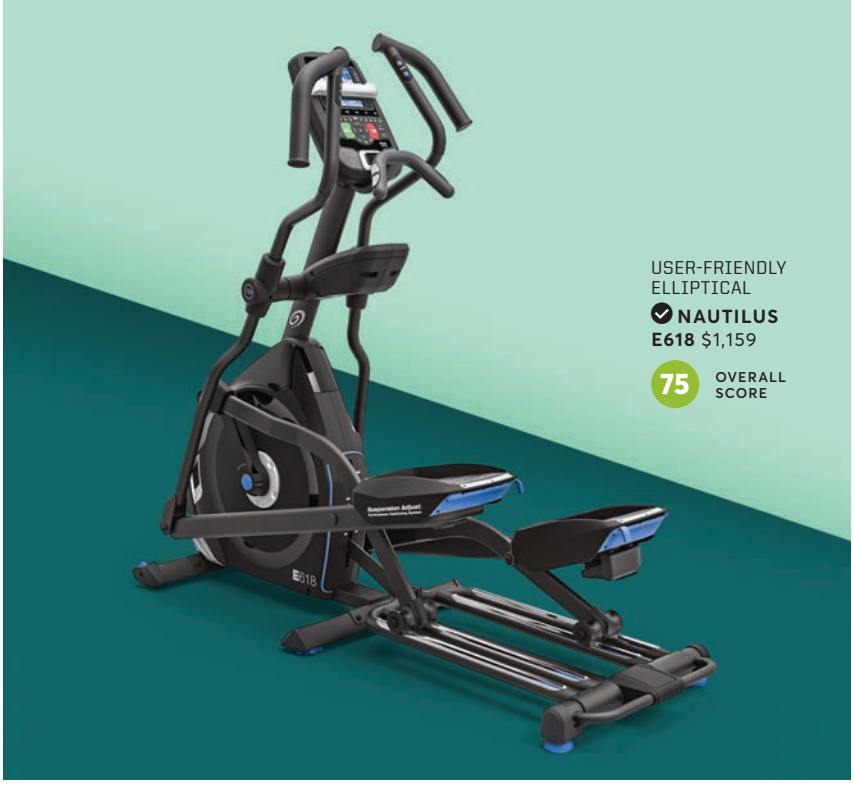
BENEFITS: Ellipticals, which simulate the motions of walking or running, are much easier on the joints than treadmills. That makes them a good choice for anyone looking for a low-impact cardio workout, including some people who experience ankle, foot, or knee pain.

Many ellipticals can also work the upper and lower body at the same time. These have two sets of handlebars, one that you push and pull to move and one that's stationary. But even if you simply hold on to the stationary handlebars, you'll still get some shoulder movement. Both can help increase the range of motion in your shoulder joints, according to Papanek.

DRAWBACKS: While you can push yourself to a high intensity on any machine, elliptical workouts tend to be somewhat less intense than those on other machines, Rogers says. So there may be better choices for people who want the most efficient workout. Plus, because the range of motion on an elliptical is limited, some very tall people may have trouble fully extending their hips and legs, Jo says.

Like a treadmill, an elliptical can take up a large amount of space and require even more room above your head. So it might not be a great pick for a small room or a basement with a low ceiling, Galeotafiore says.

BEFORE YOU BUY: Trying an elliptical before you purchase it is important to check that the model's ergonomics work for you. Make sure that you're able to maintain an upright posture comfortably while holding on to the handgrips. As the elliptical moves through its path, your wrists, arms, shoulders, and knees should be able to comfortably duplicate a running motion.



Rowers, Stair Climbers & More

A number of other types of cardio machines are on the market, but they're not currently rated by CR. They include:

› **ROWING MACHINES** Also known

PHOTO: NAUTILUS; ICONS: ADOBE STOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK

as rowing ergometers or ergs, these simulate the motions of rowing a boat and can provide a vigorous, full-body workout, Papanek says. That's great if you want to exercise your lower and upper body at the same time. They're also a good option if you want to burn a lot of calories during a workout, because the key to that goal is using the most muscles possible at one time, she says.

But people with low-back problems may find that using a rowing machine can aggravate the condition, says Sabrena Jo of ACE. And if you've never tried an erg, be aware: Proper form is key, and it can take some time to get it right.

› **STAIR CLIMBERS** Also known as stair steppers or by the brand name StairMaster, stair climbers can provide a very intense workout. That's especially true with the stepmill type, which resembles a moving staircase and requires you to lift your feet off the stairs with each step. The stair stepper variety–where you stand on two paddles that go up and down and you "climb" without picking up your feet–typically offers a good but somewhat less vigorous workout. This type is also lower-impact, however, so it may be a better choice if you have joint pain.

› **A FEW OTHER OPTIONS** You can get a good workout from cardio machines such as ski ergs (which mimic the movements of skiing) or arm ergometers, too. So take a look at different machines at the gym to see if any appeal to you. It's best to give them a try before buying. And keep in mind what Papanek says: "If you buy a piece of equipment you don't like, it's going to be a really expensive coat rack."

Stay Safe on a Treadmill

Treadmills are by far the most popular home cardio machines. But they come with risks. Two treadmill manufacturers, Peloton and Horizon, issued major treadmill recalls after dozens of injuries, some serious. (The Peloton Tread that's in CR's current ratings is an updated model.) But it's possible to get hurt while using any treadmill. These tips can help you stay safe.

1. **Choose the right location.** At home, have at least 2 feet of free space on both sides of the treadmill, and leave a 6-foot gap behind the machine and any obstacles or walls. This reduces the chance of falling into a wall or becoming wedged between the machine and a wall or piece of furniture if you slip.

2. **Wear the safety key.** This will stop the belt from turning if you fall, preventing additional injuries, such as friction burns. If children are in the home or visiting, store the key separately, ideally out of sight.

3. **Begin and finish safely.** Straddle the belt and keep your feet on the foot rails before you start the treadmill. Start the machine slowly. Hold the handrails while stepping carefully onto the belt as it starts moving. (When you're done, stop the belt before stepping off.)

4. **Look straight ahead.** You might think you need to watch your feet, but that's an easy way to lose your balance.

5. **Change speed and incline slowly.** Gradually adjusting these settings will help you stay in control, working out at a comfortable pace.

6. **Take care of your treadmill.** For a home machine, follow the manufacturer's advice to keep the walking belt lubricated, aligned, and tightened. And wipe the sweat from hand grips and controls after use.

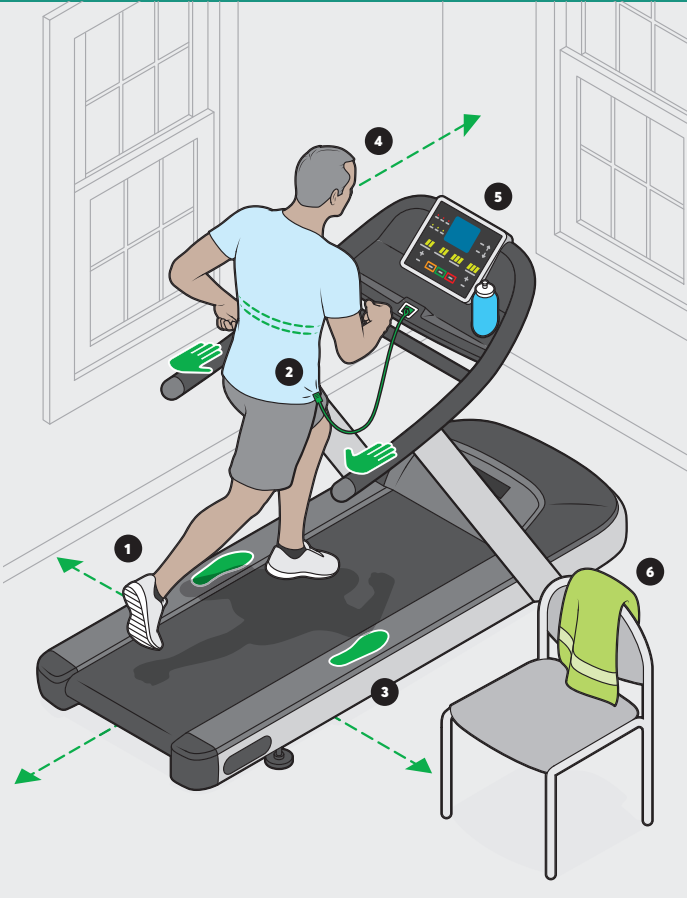


ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS PHILPOT

Ratings › **Walk This Way** Whether you're a walker or a runner, a treadmill lets you get your steps in even when the weather outside is frightful.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				
			Ergonomics	Construction	Ease of use	Exercise range	User safety
NONFOLDING TREADMILLS							
Peloton Tread	88	$3,500	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫
True Performance 100	87	$4,200	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
NordicTrack Commercial X22i	84	$3,500	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
Precor TRM 243	84	$3,400	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
Landice L7 Pro Sports	83	$4,800	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
SportsArt T615	81	$3,300	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
True M30	81	$2,600	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
FOLDING TREADMILLS							
Horizon 7.4 AT	87	$1,600	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼
Sole F80	86	$1,700	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫
Horizon 7.0 AT	85	$1,000	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫
Nautilus T616	84	$1,100	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼
NordicTrack Commercial 2450	84	$2,300	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼
ProForm SMART Pro 2000	83	$1,600	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	❗
Spirit XT485	83	$2,400	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫
LifeSpan TR5500i	82	$2,600	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼
Bowflex Treadmill 10	82	$2,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼
Xterra TRX5500	82	$2,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫
Sole F63	81	$1,200	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼
Sole F65	81	$1,400	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏬
Xterra TRX3500	81	$1,300	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫
NordicTrack EXP 7i	81	$1,200	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/treadmills, CR.org/exercisebikes, and CR.org/ellipticals.

HOW WE TEST: **Ergonomics** reflects how well the machine accommodates the needs of different users. **Construction** considers design choices and our perception of quality based on noise, feel, and for treadmills, durability test results. **Ease of use** indicates how easy it is to read the display and use the programs and controls. **Exercise range** is how well each machine provides an effective workout for users of various fitness levels. **User safety** assesses safety features such as stability, and for treadmills, emergency stop.

ICON: ADOBE STOCK

Ratings › **Step It Up** An elliptical is a good choice if you want a low-impact workout that exercises your arms and legs at the same time, and an exercise bike is a great option for small spaces.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results							
			Type	Adjustability	Data interface	Noise	Features	Capacity	Warranty	Ease of assembly
EXERCISE BIKES										
Peloton Bike	88	$1,450	Connected	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
Sole SB900	80	$1,000	Conventional	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃
Schwinn IC4	78	$1,000	Conventional	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃
Echelon EX-5S	72	$1,600	Connected	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				
			Ergonomics	Construction	Ease of use	Exercise range	User safety
ELLIPTICALS							
Vision S7100HRT	77	$3,200	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃
Sole E95S	76	$2,200	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
Diamondback 1060Ef	76	$1,500	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃
Nautilus E618	75	$1,400	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Precor EFX 225	74	$3,000	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	!	⌃
Schwinn 470	74	$1,100	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Schwinn 430	72	$900	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃
NordicTrack Commercial 14.9	72	$1,600	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃⌃
Sole E25	72	$1,100	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	!	⌃⌃
Precor EFX 222	72	$2,800	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Nautilus E616	71	$1,100	!	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃
NordicTrack Commercial 9.9	68	$1,850	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃⌃
Octane Fitness Q35X	68	$2,500	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃
ProForm Carbon E7	68	$800	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
ProForm Carbon EL	68	$650	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃

HOW WE TEST: For ellipticals, see "How We Test" on the facing page. For exercise bikes, **connected** means connected to the internet. **Adjustability** rates the ability to control the position of the seat and handlebars. **Data interface** assesses the display of information related to a workout. **Noise** rates how quiet the bike is when it's being used. **Features** is an evaluation of the extras available, such as toe clips, water bottle holders, and dumbbells.

BOTTOM ICON: SHUTTERFLY

TOO HOT?
The right bedroom environment can help prime your body for sleep. See our best temperature solutions, page 31.
NOISE KEEPING YOU UP?
Learn effective ways to create the quiet surroundings you need, page 30.

HOW TO GET A GR

BY JOANNE CHEN AND TANYA CHRISTIAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SINELAB

Can't fall asleep? Toss and turn all night? Wake up tired and sore? Our expert advice—and the top mattresses, pillows, and more from our tests—can help you finally rest easy.

YOU AVOID CAFFEINE 6 hours before bedtime, refrain from work email after 8, and even set a reminder to go to bed every night by 11. But before you know it, it's well past midnight and you're having trouble falling asleep and staying that way.

You're not the only one. In CR's nationally representative survey of 2,084 adults in the U.S. conducted in October 2022, 9 out of 10 said they had experienced sleep challenges in the previous 12 months, and 29 percent had taken a prescription drug, over-the-counter medication, or a supplement to try to improve their sleep.

But what if the fix is actually treating the sleep space itself? "Sleep

CONGESTED ALL NIGHT?
Remove dust and airborne allergens the easy way, page 30.
CAN'T GET COMFY?
Find a really good pillow and the right materials for sheets, blankets, and more, page 28.
MORNING ACHES AND PAINS?
A worn-out mattress (or the wrong one) could be the culprit. Pick the perfect upgrade, page 26.

EAT NIGHT'S SLEEP

is a spontaneous process that is sometimes hard to summon," says Eti Ben Simon, PhD, a sleep researcher at UC Berkeley's Center for Human Sleep Science. "But we can help it by creating the right environment."

Don't worry: You won't need to invest time or money in a total bedroom overhaul to achieve a better sleep sanctuary. Adjusting a few key elements, including the temperature of your room and the thickness of your pillows, can help create an oasis you'll actually enjoy retiring to each night. "If your bedroom is not only a comfortable space but a desirable one, then it has more pull," says W. Chris Winter, MD, a sleep medicine specialist and neurologist, and the author of "The Sleep Solution" (Penguin Random House, 2018). Those same creature comforts can also help you get to sleep more easily once you're all tucked in by supporting your body's natural sleep processes throughout the night. Here's how to optimize your bedroom for better rest right now.

FIND THE RIGHT MATTRESS

BACK SLEEPERS
If you like a foam mattress, try a medium-firm to firm style. They're better for back (and stomach) sleepers than soft foam.

Casper Original

CO-SLEEPERS
An adjustable air model lets each partner customize the firmness to their liking. Foam models and innersprings with individually wrapped coils can also help prevent a sleeper from feeling their partner's movements.

Sleep Number 360 p6 Smart Bed

IF YOU'VE EVER JUMPED OUT OF BED after a night in a hotel thinking, "Wow, I feel so much better than I do at home," maybe you should consider a new mattress. This is especially true if your body has changed since you bought your mattress, says Naimish Baxi, MD, an attending physiatrist at New York City's Hospital for Special Surgery. For instance, if you've gained some weight, you may need a mattress with more support.

Or maybe your mattress is just worn-out. Most should stay in good condition for seven to 10 years, the time covered by a typical warranty, says Chris Regan, testing director for mattresses at Consumer Reports. But sometimes they don't hold up. The top layer of padding might collapse and the bottom of the mattress can sag over time. And if your mattress wasn't a good fit for your body or sleeping style in the first place–or wasn't the best quality–it might be time to start shopping.

Types of Mattresses

They fall under three basic categories:

- **Innerspring** mattresses feature coils topped with fabric or foam (or both). The surface is resilient, and you'll feel as if you're sleeping on top of the mattress instead being hugged by it. Hybrids–with thicker layers of foam–offer a mix of cradling and resilience.
- **Foam** mattresses are typically made from synthetic foam, including memory foam (which softens with your body heat to closely cradle your body), or latex, which has a springier feel.
- **Adjustable air** mattresses consist of inflatable chambers (topped with foam or fabric) that you can customize

MATTRESS CARE TIPS

Switch positions. Rotate your mattress every six months. If you sleep with a partner, sleep in the middle. If you're sleeping alone, try moving to different parts of the bed to avoid uneven wear.

Get a good topper. This extra layer won't improve a poor or worn-out mattress, but it can soften a high-quality one that simply feels too firm.

SIDE SLEEPERS
Innerspring styles with a cushiony top layer offer support and comfort for your shoulders and hips. A softer foam mattress will let your body sink in a bit, cradling it.

Avocado Green

to your desired firmness using an electric pump, a remote control, or a smartphone app. Most allow you to inflate each half of the bed separately, so they can be a good choice for partners with different firmness preferences.

Smart Shopping

There's no "best" type. Mattresses within the same category can feel very different depending on the construction. So CR's experts advise trying a model in person before you buy it, even if you're interested in an online brand. Many (like Casper and Purple) are now sold in retail locations. (If you can't try a mattress in person, make sure it has a free trial period.) To test a mattress, lie in your favorite sleep position, with a pillow under your head, for at least 15 minutes. If your back feels overarched or like it's slumping into the surface, then the mattress isn't supportive enough. If your body feels pressed against the mattress and not well cushioned, then you need one with more pressure relief.

The most durable mattresses in our ratings (see six top picks at right and starting on page 32) stand up to our tests simulating eight to 10 years of average use and have high owner satisfaction scores, which reflect thousands of readers' real-world experiences.

Zip on a waterproof encasement to keep dust mites at bay. It also prevents sweat and stains from permeating the mattress, which speed deterioration.

Don't forget to vacuum under and around your bed when you clean your floors. Use an attachment tool to get into crevices and around the headboard.

TOP CHOICES FROM CR'S TESTS

Innerspring

Avocado Green $1,900 — 84 OVERALL SCORE

CR's top-rated mattress is comfortable yet firm, offering stellar support for sleepers of all sizes and sleep positions.

Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush $800 — 82 OVERALL SCORE

Great quality at an attractive price. This innerspring pairs terrific support with a cushy feel for well under $1,000.

Foam

Essentia Stratami $3,500 — 82 OVERALL SCORE

A great choice for petite and average back sleepers, it also delivers standout support for side sleepers of all sizes.

Casper Original $1,200 — 81 OVERALL SCORE

This foam model is particularly supportive for back sleepers—and you won't bounce when your partner moves, either.

Adjustable Air

Sleep Number 360 p6 Smart Bed $3,000 — 80 OVERALL SCORE

This top-scoring mattress offers great support for side and back sleepers of all sizes, plus excellent stability.

Saatva Solaire $3,300 — 78 OVERALL SCORE

Durable and supportive for both side and back sleepers, this model features a cover made with organic cotton.

POOR — EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

TRY A WEIGHTED BLANKET
Studies suggest that these blankets may help calm anxiety. If a heavy covering sounds soothing to you, pick one that's about 10 percent of your weight.
DOUBLE UP
If you and your partner have different temperature preferences, make the bed with twin flat sheets and individual blankets and comforters, so you can each control your side.
ADD A TOPPER
A foam pad offers sink-in cushioning, while one filled with cotton, wool, or down will feel fluffy. Hot sleeper? Try a cooling pad with water circulating through interior tubing.

2

CHOOSE COMFORTABLE BEDDING

YOUR BODY TEMPERATURE SHIFTS over the course of the day and night. "Core temperature decreases slightly and skin temperature increases around bedtime to prepare you for sleep," says Roy Raymann, PhD, a San Diego-based sleep consultant who has published scientific papers on sleep and temperature. "During the second half of the night it flips to help you wake up." The right bedding can help that process. Cozy but breathable sheets and blankets warm the skin while allowing heat from the core to dissipate into the air, Raymann says. Layering lets you adjust throughout the night to stay comfortable. Here's what else to know as you shop.

SHEETS

Natural fibers—such as 100 percent cotton or linen—are a good choice. They're more breathable than polyester or cotton-poly blends. Tencel lyocell and rayon sheets work well, too. They can be quite soft and wick away sweat quickly, says Deborah Young, a textile instructor at the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in Los Angeles. Some

BEDDING CARE TIPS

Change your sheets once a week. Kill dust mites by using your washer's hottest setting followed by your dryer's normal setting.

Wash blankets according to label instructions once a season. No label? Use a gentle cycle with warm water and a mild detergent. Avoid fabric softeners; they leave residue and can make sensitive skin irritated and itchy.

synthetics are specially engineered to allow for airflow and wicking. "Those features are usually bragged about on the packaging," Young says. One feature you may not have to pay much attention to: an extremely high thread count (the number of threads per square inch). We've tested sheets with claimed thread counts as high as 1,000, but the top scorers have far lower counts than that. The L.L.Bean Pima Cotton Percale ($160 for a fitted and flat sheet and two pillowcases) has a claimed count of only 280; the Matouk Sierra ($125 for a fitted sheet) has a claimed thread count of 350.

BLANKETS

Again, go with breathable fibers, including cotton and lightweight wool such as merino wool, Young says. They'll keep you pleasantly toasty and also prevent you from waking up because of overheating. Fleece, usually made with polyester, offers warmth, too, but less breathability, so it's not the best choice if you tend to sleep hot.

COMFORTERS

A cotton comforter filled with down–generally the softest and fluffiest feathers of a goose or duck–will add warmth without trapping excessive heat. If you prefer to avoid down, look for a down-alternative comforter described as breathable or temperature-regulating. Whichever filling you choose, look for designs that have many smaller individual compartments sewn all the way through the comforter. This helps prevent the filling from bunching up and leaving uncomfortable lumps and thin spots. Protect the comforter with a cotton duvet cover that you can remove and wash with your sheets. (You won't have to wash the actual comforter as often.)

PILLOWS

Pillows are a must for a comfortable night's sleep and a less achy morning. The right pillow extends from your shoulder blades past the top of your head. It stabilizes your neck in a neutral position and aligns it with the rest of your body. Pick the best match for your favorite sleeping position.

- **Side sleepers** need pillows with adequate loft (the compressed height of the pillow when your head is resting on it). "Make sure the height of the pillow covers the distance between the ear and shoulder on the side you're lying on," says Naimish Baxi, MD. It should fill that space, supporting your neck. If your top leg pitches forward and puts a strain on that top hip, try a pillow between your legs extending from mid-thigh to mid-lower leg, says Ahmed Radwan, PhD, a professor of physical therapy and director of the Center for Ergonomic Analysis and Research at Utica University in New York. This will realign your pelvis and add cushioning between your knees.
- **Back sleepers** have an advantage: The position distributes weight more evenly than side sleeping, Baxi says, and they're less vulnerable to pressure on the lower back (assuming they have a supportive mattress). Still, a good pillow helps. Choose one lofty enough to cradle your head without straining your neck. Bad back? A pillow under your knees may help the muscles around the lower spine relax, Radwan says.
- **Stomach sleepers** should try to switch to the back or side. "Stomach sleeping isn't ideal because it's impossible to maintain a neutral neck," Baxi says. If you don't want to switch, Radwan suggests skipping the pillow to help keep your neck and spine in closer alignment. But, he stresses, "the priority should be to avoid stomach sleeping."

Wash down and synthetic comforters according to the care label (some are dry-clean only). To keep filling from clumping, add a few tennis balls when drying.

Wash pillows once a season according to label instructions, two at a time to keep the load balanced.

BEST PILLOW PICKS

Great All-Around

Coop Home Goods The Original $72

90 OVERALL SCORE

Our top-rated pillow is filled with shredded memory foam and microfiber. You can adjust the amount to get excellent support in any sleep position.

Easy to Adjust

Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate $160

85 OVERALL SCORE

Side and back sleepers can zip in one, two, or three memory-foam and down-alternative layers for customized support.

Nice Price

Rest Haven Memory Foam $25 for a 2-pack

71 OVERALL SCORE

This bargain buy offers impressive support for side sleepers at less than $12.50 each.

3

PREP YOUR ROOM FOR SLEEP

KEEP IT COOL
Set your ceiling fan to rotate counter-clockwise to create a refreshing breeze.

BE SMART ABOUT SOUND
If you use a white-noise machine, choose a sound that resembles the one you're trying to mask. The whoosh of recorded ocean waves blends away the din of passing traffic, for example.

TRY A SLEEP MASK
A contoured design won't press against your lids. The Mzoo, about $22 and a favorite in our evaluation, has adjustable straps.

JUST AS IMPORTANT AS YOUR MATTRESS AND BEDDING is the environment inside your bedroom. Controlling the levels of light, temperature, and humidity–and even the quality of air–can be the difference between a restless and restful night.

LIGHTING

Darkness is the body's cue to go to bed, allowing the pineal gland in the brain to secrete more melatonin, the hormone associated with sleep. Light suppresses that production. "Your circadian rhythm works by comparing the light you were exposed to in the day to the light you're experiencing at night," says Jamie Zeitzer, PhD, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral science at Stanford University's Center for Sleep & Circadian Sciences. So get as much outdoor light as you can during the day, and reinforce that contrast between day and night by putting away your phone and tablets and dimming your lamps well before bed. Our favorite sunrise alarm clocks (such as the Philips SmartSleep Wake-Up Light, $100) help that process along by creating both a simulated sunrise (to help you wake up) and calming sunset (to help you feel sleepy) in your bedroom.

Block outside light with black-out shades or a sleep mask. That can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer, Zeitzer says. CR's October 2022 survey found that about 8 out of 10 people who bought each of these items to improve sleep found them to be somewhat or very effective.

FRESH AIR

Indoor air quality is an important consideration, especially for people with asthma or dust allergies, says W. Chris Winter, MD. Dust and vacuum your room once a week, and if

BEDROOM CARE TIPS

Clutter increases stress in some people, according to a 2018 study, and stress may subvert sleep. Keep things like paperwork and unfolded laundry elsewhere, or hide them in beautiful bins.

Vacuum window-unit A/C filters every few weeks. Wash with warm soapy water a few times a season to maximize airflow.

BLOCK OUT LIGHT
Try black-out shades or curtains you can control with a remote or smartphone app. Some can even be programmed to rise up or open in the a.m. (Measure carefully to avoid "halos" of light around the edges.)
HUMIDIFY THE RIGHT WAY
Position your machine near the bed, raised at least 2 feet above the floor. This allows more moisture to dissipate into the air.
CLEAR THE AIR
Set your air purifier away from (not against) walls and furniture so that airflow won't be obstructed.

respiratory woes are still keeping you awake, consider adding an air purifier. CR's air purifier tests include a noise assessment, so you can pick one that won't keep you up, like the Honeywell InSight HPA5300B at right.

TEMPERATURE

A cool room and cozy bedding (see page 28) ready your body for sleep. To help your body cool its core, set your thermostat to about 65 degrees in time for bed. A fan or an air conditioner can help, too. Look for one that won't make a racket, like the Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ083WC1 at right. According to CR's survey, 94 percent of people who bought an air conditioner or fan to improve sleep found it somewhat or very effective.

HUMIDITY

Low indoor humidity can dry your skin, nose, and throat. Allergens also become airborne more easily–irritating airways and making it harder to breathe, Raymann says. Ultrasonic humidifiers, like the Babymoov Hygro (+) at right, tend to be quieter than evaporative models, which use a fan instead of vibration to move vapor. CR experts advise setting the humidity level between 30 and 50 percent to loosen mucous membranes for better breathing–and sleeping.

Keep your humidifier clean. To fend off mold, rinse it with water daily and deep clean once a week by washing it with a water-vinegar solution in proportions directed by manufacturer instructions.

QUIETER BEDROOM GEAR

Air Purifier

Honeywell InSight HPA5300B $290

74 OVERALL SCORE

This model does an impressive job of removing dust, pollen, and smoke from the air—and gets the job done pretty quietly, even when running at a higher speed.

Air Conditioner

Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ083WC1 $424

87 OVERALL SCORE

Our top-rated model for a 250- to 350-square-foot room offers all-around great performance with fast, quiet cooling.

Humidifier

Babymoov Hygro (+) Humidifier $85

95 OVERALL SCORE

Topping our ratings for small-room models (from 26 to 299 square feet), this cool-mist option is effective, easy to use, energy-efficient, and quiet, too.

POOR EXCELLENT | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Ratings › **The Dream Team** The best mattresses and pillows in our tests will help keep your neck and spine aligned and supported all night long. Pick the one that's best for your sleep style and body type.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
			Comfort	Owner satisfaction	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/tall side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/tall back sleeper	Durability	Stabilization	Firmness rating	Latex foam	Retains warmth
INNERSPRING MATTRESSES															
Avocado Green	84	$1,900	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	7	●	
Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush	82	$800	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	3		
Casper Original Hybrid	82	$1,445	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	3		
SleepFresh Hybrid	81	$1,300	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	3		
Ethan Allen EA Signature Platinum Plush	81	$3,420	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	5	●	
Charles P. Rogers Lifetime 8 Hybrid	81	$3,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	5	●	
Parachute Eco Comfort	81	$2,400	–	–	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	5		
Avocado Green Mattress Pillowtop	79	$2,400	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	5	●	●
Charles P. Rogers Powercore Estate 5000 Firm	79	$2,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	6	●	
Zoma Hybrid	78	$800	–	–	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	3		
Casper Wave Hybrid	78	$2,300	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	2		
Beautyrest BR-800 12" Medium Firm	78	$770	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	6		
Big Fig The Mattress for a Bigger Figure	77	$1,600	–	–	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	6	●	●
Charles P. Rogers Real Bed	76	$1,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	3	●	
Leesa Legend Hybrid	76	$2,100	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	3		
Tuft & Needle Nod Hybrid MAT-NODH-01-Q	76	$1,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	4		
Beautyrest Silver BRS900-TSS Medium Firm Tight Top	76	$900	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	4		
Diamond Intention Hybrid	75	$2,200	–	–	●	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	2		
Beautyrest PressureSmart 11.5" Firm	75	$1,000	●	●	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	7		
Lull Luxe Hybrid	75	$1,500	–	–	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	4		
FOAM MATTRESSES															
Essentia Stratami	82	$3,500	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	6	●	
Casper Original	81	$1,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	5		●
Sleep on Latex Pure Green Firm	80	$1,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	7	●	●
Avocado Latex Mattress	79	$3,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	5	●	
Tuft & Needle Mint	78	$1,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	4		
BedInABox Tranquillium	77	$1,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	6		
Bedgear S3 Performance	77	$800	–	–	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	5		●
Lull The Lull	76	$800	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	6		
Novaform 10" SoFresh Responsive Foam	76	$530	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	5		
GhostBed The GhostBed	75	$1,000	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	7	●	
GhostBed Luxe	75	$1,500	●	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	4		
Serta SleepToGo	74	$800	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	●	5		●
Tuft & Needle T&N Original Mattress	74	$1,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	5		
Saatva Zenhaven Latex	74	$2,600	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	●	3	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
			Comfort	Owner satisfaction	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/tall side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/tall back sleeper	Durability	Stabilization	Firmness rating	Latex foam	Retains warmth
FOAM MATTRESSES *Continued*															
Spa Sensations by Zinus 12" Theratouch M-FMS-1200Q	74	$300	–	–	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5		●
Leesa Studio by Leesa	74	$750	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	4		●
ADJUSTABLE AIR MATTRESSES															
Sleep Number 360 p6 Smart Bed	80	$3,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	4		
Saatva Solaire	78	$3,300	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	4	●	
Personal Comfort H10 Bed	77	$4,100	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	6		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features				
			Side support	Back support	Resilience	Use and preference	Breathability	Washable	Memory foam	Cooling properties	Type	Retains warmth
PILLOWS												
Coop Home Goods The Original	90	$72	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	●		Memory foam and microfiber	●
Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate	85	$160	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	Cover only	●		Memory foam pieces and down alternative fibers	●
GhostBed Shredded (2-pack)	80	$190	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	Cover only	●	●	Shredded memory foam pieces and polyester gel fiber	●
Tuft & Needle Original Foam	79	$100	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	Cover only			Polyurethane foam	
Comfort Revolution Blue Bubble Gel	73	$60	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▼	●	●	●	Polyurethane foam/ gel pad	
Tempur-Pedic Tempur-Cloud Breeze Dual Cooling	72	$170	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▼	Cover only	●	●	Memory foam and gel	
Brooklyn Bedding Talalay Latex High Loft	72	$89	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	Cover only			Latex foam	
Sealy Memory Foam Gel	71	$40	▲▲	●	▲	▲▲	▼	Cover only	●	●	Polyurethane foam pad	
Rest Haven Memory Foam (2-pack)	71	$25	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲		●		Shredded memory foam pieces	
Avocado Green	71	$129	▲▲	▲▲	▼▼	▲	▲▲	Cover only			Latex and kapok	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/mattresses and CR.org/pillows.

HOW WE TEST: For mattresses, the **Overall Score** is based on the product's performance in all of our tests and member surveys. The **Survey Results** section includes two ratings based on our members' survey feedback about almost 67,000 mattresses purchased between 2012 and 2022. The **Comfort score** reflects our mattress survey data, in which members rated their mattresses with a 6-point system from very poor to excellent. **Owner satisfaction** is based on a 6-point rating system from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied. In cases where we have insufficient data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (—), the model gets weighted category average scores for comfort and satisfaction. **Side sleeper** reflects a mattress's ability to keep a side sleeper's spine relatively horizontal. **Back sleeper** is a measure of a mattress's ability to maintain the natural curve of a back sleeper's spine. In our support tests, participants were women 4 feet 11 inches to 5 feet 1 inch and 110 to 127.5 pounds for the petite sleeper scores, and men 6 feet 2 inches to 6 feet 4 inches and 220 to 242 pounds for the large/tall sleeper scores. The average sleeper scores are an average of the petite and large/tall scores for side and back sleeper support. **Durability** gauges how well a mattress keeps its shape, height, firmness, and support after a simulated eight to 10 years of use. This includes passing a 309-pound roller over each mattress 30,000 times. A high score for **stabilization** indicates little or no vibration is transferred across the mattress. We rate **firmness** on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the firmest. For pillows, the **Overall Score** is based on user preference data, how well the pillows support back and side sleepers, whether the pillows maintain their shape over time, and whether they allow moisture to dissipate.

The Surprising Problem With Dark Chocolate

CR tested dark chocolate bars and found worrisome levels of dangerous heavy metals in the majority of them. Here, the ones that had the most lead and cadmium, and the ones that are safer to enjoy.

BY KEVIN LORIA **PHOTOS BY BEN GOLDSTEIN**

FOR MANY OF US, chocolate is more than just a tasty treat. It's a mood lifter, an energy booster, a reward after a tough day, a favorite holiday gift.

People also choose dark chocolate in particular for its potential health benefits, thanks to studies that suggest its rich supply of antioxidants may improve heart health and other conditions, and for its relatively low levels of sugar. In fact, more than half of people in a recent survey from the National Confectioners Association described dark chocolate as a "better for you" candy.

But there's a dark side to this "healthier" chocolate. Research has found that some dark chocolate bars contain cadmium and lead–two heavy metals linked to a host of health problems in children and adults.

The chocolate industry has been grappling with ways to lower those levels. To see how much of a risk these favorite treats pose, Consumer Reports scientists recently measured the amount of heavy metals in 28 dark chocolate bars. They detected cadmium and lead in all of them.

Heavy Metals in Your Chocolate

CR tested a mix of brands, including smaller ones, such as Alter Eco and Mast, and more familiar ones, like Dove and Ghirardelli.

For 23 of the bars, eating just an ounce a day would put an adult over a level that public health authorities and CR's experts say may be harmful for at least one of those heavy metals. Five of the bars were above those levels for both cadmium and lead. (See CR's chocolate test results, starting on page 36.)

That's risky stuff: Consistent, long-term exposure to even small amounts of heavy metals can lead to a variety of health problems. The danger is greatest for pregnant people and young children because the metals can cause developmental problems, affect brain

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

BARS THAT ARE HIGH IN HEAVY METALS

CR's testing revealed that many popular dark chocolate bars contain worrisome levels of toxic heavy metals. The five shown here were high in both cadmium and lead.

CR's Chocolate Test Results

TO DETERMINE the risk posed by the dark chocolates in CR's test, we used the maximum allowable dose level (MADL) per day set by the state of California for lead (0.5 micrograms) and cadmium (4.1 mcg). The chart here lists the percentage of the MADL supplied in an ounce of each chocolate. Our results indicate which products had comparatively higher levels and are not assessments of whether a product exceeds a legal standard.

We used those levels because there are no federal limits for the amount of lead and cadmium most foods can contain, and CR's scientists believe that California's levels are the most protective available.

THE CHART IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR CATEGORIES

- → Above the cutoff for both lead and cadmium (FIVE BARS)
- → Above the cutoff for just lead (10 BARS)
- → Above the cutoff for just cadmium (EIGHT BARS)
- → Below the cutoff for both (FIVE BARS)

While both heavy metals cause serious health risks, products within each category are listed in order of lead level, because that heavy metal poses particular concerns and no amount of it is considered safe.

When choosing a chocolate, also consider other foods you eat that might contain lead or cadmium. Even among the safer chocolates, we found some that were close to the MADL for either lead or cadmium. As a result, eating other foods with these heavy metals could push you over the limit.

Key BELOW 100% CR'S LEVELS | ABOVE 100% CR'S LEVELS

HIGH IN BOTH LEAD & CADMIUM

Theo
Organic Pure Dark Chocolate
70% Cocoa

LEAD **120%**
CADMIUM **142%**

Trader Joe's
The Dark Chocolate Lover's Chocolate
85% Cacao

LEAD **127%**
CADMIUM **229%**

Theo
Organic Extra Dark Pure Dark Chocolate
85% Cocoa

LEAD **140%**
CADMIUM **189%**

Lily's
Extremely Dark Chocolate
85% Cocoa

LEAD **143%**
CADMIUM **101%**

Green & Black's
Organic Dark Chocolate
70% Cacao

LEAD **143%**
CADMIUM **181%**

HIGH IN LEAD

Tony's
Chocolonely Dark Chocolate 70% Cocoa

LEAD **134%**
CADMIUM **28%**

Lily's
Extra Dark Chocolate 70% Cocoa

LEAD **144%**
CADMIUM **42%**

Godiva
Signature Dark Chocolate 72% Cacao

LEAD **146%**
CADMIUM **25%**

Chocolove
Strong Dark Chocolate 70% Cocoa

LEAD **152%**
CADMIUM **60%**

Lindt
Excellence Dark Chocolate 85% Cocoa

LEAD **166%**
CADMIUM **80%**

Endangered Species
Bold + Silky Dark Chocolate 72% Cocoa

LEAD **181%**
CADMIUM **31%**

Trader Joe's
Dark Chocolate 72% Cacao

LEAD **192%**
CADMIUM **36%**

Hu
Organic Simple Dark Chocolate 70% Cacao

LEAD **210%**
CADMIUM **56%**

Chocolove
Extreme Dark Chocolate 88% Cocoa

LEAD **240%**
CADMIUM **83%**

Hershey's
Special Dark Mildly Sweet Chocolate

LEAD **265%**
CADMIUM **30%**

HIGH IN CADMIUM

Beyond Good
Organic Pure Dark Chocolate 70% Cocoa

LEAD **42%**
CADMIUM **112%**

Beyond Good
Organic Pure Dark Chocolate 80% Cocoa

LEAD **42%**
CADMIUM **138%**

Equal Exchange
Organic Extra Dark Chocolate 80% Cacao

LEAD **45%**
CADMIUM **120%**

Lindt
Excellence Dark Chocolate 70% Cocoa

LEAD **48%**
CADMIUM **116%**

Scharffen Berger
Extra Dark Chocolate 82% Cacao

LEAD **49%**
CADMIUM **136%**

Alter Eco
Organic Dark Chocolate Classic Blackout 85% Cacao

LEAD **49%**
CADMIUM **204%**

Pascha
Organic Very Dark Chocolate 85% Cacao

LEAD **68%**
CADMIUM **253%**

Dove
Promises Deeper Dark Chocolate 70% Cacao

LEAD **74%**
CADMIUM **112%**

Note: This chart shows the labels for chocolates as they were when CR tested the products. Some labels may have changed since.

SAFER CHOICES

The five bars shown here had the lowest levels of both lead and cadmium in our tests. Still, some come close to the daily limits we used, so CR experts recommend eating dark chocolate occasionally, not every day.

Mast
Organic Dark Chocolate
80% Cocoa

LEAD **14%**

CADMIUM **40%**

Taza Chocolate
Organic Deliciously Dark Chocolate
70% Cacao

LEAD **33%**

CADMIUM **74%**

Ghirardelli
Intense Dark Chocolate
86% Cacao

LEAD **36%**

CADMIUM **39%**

Ghirardelli
Intense Dark Chocolate
72% Cacao

LEAD **61%**

CADMIUM **96%**

Valrhona
Abinao Dark Chocolate
85% Cacao

LEAD **63%**

CADMIUM **73%**

Note: This chart shows the labels for chocolates as they were when CR tested the products. Some labels may have changed since.

BELOW 100% CR'S LEVELS

ABOVE 100% CR'S LEVELS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

development, and lead to lower IQ, says Tunde Akinleye, the CR food safety researcher who led this testing project.

"But there are risks for people of any age," he says. Frequent exposure to lead in adults, for example, can lead to nervous system problems, hypertension, immune system suppression, kidney damage, and reproductive issues. While most people don't eat chocolate every day, 15 percent do, according to the market research firm Mintel. Even if you aren't a frequent consumer of chocolate, lead and cadmium can still be a concern. It can be found in lots of other foods—such as sweet potatoes, spinach, and carrots—and small amounts from multiple sources can add up to dangerous levels. That's why it's important to limit exposure when you can.

Still, you don't need to swear off chocolate entirely, Akinleye says. He adds that while most of the chocolate bars in CR's tests had concerning levels of lead, cadmium, or both, five of them were relatively low in both. "That shows it's possible for companies to make products with lower amounts of heavy metals—and for consumers to find safer products that they enjoy," he says.

And in addition to choosing your dark chocolates wisely, there are a number of other steps you can take to continue enjoying chocolate safely.

Cacao's Dark Side

Chocolate is made from the cacao bean, which has two main components: cocoa solids and cocoa butter. Together, these are called cacao or cocoa.

Dark chocolate's reputation as a relatively healthy treat stems mostly from the cocoa solids. These are packed with flavanols, which are antioxidants linked to improved blood vessel function, reduced inflammation, and lower cholesterol. Dark chocolate is also lower in sugar and higher in fiber than milk chocolate, and it has magnesium and potassium. Unfortunately, cocoa solids are also where the heavy metals, especially cadmium, lurk. That makes it tricky to balance dark chocolate's risks and benefits.

Some of the same concerns may extend to products made with cocoa powder—which is essentially pure cocoa solids—such as hot cocoa, and brownie and cake mixes, though they have varying amounts of cacao and possibly heavy metals.

Dark chocolate tends to be higher in heavy metals than milk chocolate, probably because of its higher cacao content. There is no official cutoff, but dark chocolates are generally at least 65 percent cacao by weight, says Michael J. DiBartolomeis, PhD, a toxicologist and former official at the California Department of Public Health who has researched heavy metals in chocolate.

CR's tests found five chocolate bars with relatively low levels of both lead and cadmium.

Getting the Lead and Cadmium Out

To further complicate the issue, lead and cadmium appear to get into cacao in different ways, which means that each requires a different type of fix, DiBartolomeis says.

Between 2019 and 2022, he and other researchers studied how metals might contaminate cacao, as part of a settlement to a lawsuit against chocolate manufacturers brought by As You Sow, an organization that pushes for corporate accountability. As You Sow had previously found high levels of lead and cadmium in some chocolates.

The researchers found that cacao plants take up cadmium from the soil, with the metal accumulating in cacao beans as the tree grows. That's similar to how heavy metals contaminate some other foods.

But lead seems to get into cacao *after* beans are harvested. The researchers found that the metal was typically on the outer shell of the cocoa bean, not in the bean itself. Moreover, lead levels were low soon after beans were picked and removed from pods but increased as beans dried in the sun for days. During that time, lead-filled dust and dirt accumulated on the beans. "We collected beans on the ground that were heavily loaded with lead on the outer shell," DiBartolomeis says.

Because of the different ways that cadmium and lead get into chocolate, addressing the contamination requires different solutions.

For lead, that will mean changes in harvesting and manufacturing practices, says Danielle Fugere, president of As You Sow. Such practices could include minimizing soil contact with beans as they lie in the sun, and drying beans on tables or clean tarps away from roads or with protective covers, so lead-contaminated dust won't land on them. Another option is finding ways to remove metal contaminants when beans are cleaned at factories, Fugere says.

Solving for cadmium is trickier, though it is possible, DiBartolomeis says. Carefully breeding or genetically engineering plants to take up less of the heavy metal could help, though that could take several years. Other potential options include replacing older cacao trees with younger ones, because cadmium levels tend to increase as the plants get older, and removing or treating soil known to be contaminated with cadmium.

Safer Chocolate

More immediately, DiBartolomeis says, chocolate makers should survey cacao-growing areas to determine cadmium levels, and favor beans from places with lower levels. If necessary, they should blend beans from higher-cadmium areas with beans with lower levels, as some manufacturers do now. Alex Whitmore, CEO at Taza, which makes one of the products with lower levels of both metals in CR's tests, says that's what his company does, mixing beans from "different origins to ensure that the final product" has lower levels.

The National Confectioners Association, which funded the research into heavy metals in chocolate as part of the As You Sow settlement, says "lead reductions can be expected within the first year of implementing new handling practices," though it says lowering cadmium may take longer.

Some manufacturers with higher levels of metals in our tests said their products are below levels set by the settlement. Others said that the metals occur naturally in soil and that they take steps to try to reduce it. Alter Eco, Endangered Species, Theo, and Trader Joe's did not respond.

Taking steps to reduce heavy metals in cacao can pay off: CR's test results, after all, show that while contamination with heavy metals is common, it is not inevitable.

And in addition to choosing products with lower levels of lead and cadmium, other steps can also help reduce the risks. (See "Better Ways to Eat Dark Chocolate," on the facing page.) In fact, DiBartolomeis says that while he cautions pregnant people and children from eating dark chocolate, he doesn't tell most people to give it up, just to know the risks and not overdo it.

The Different Kinds of Chocolate

In general, the darker the chocolate, the greater the risk of contamination with heavy metals. Below are the most common kinds of chocolate, listed by how much cacao they typically contain, plus what they are most often used for.

Cocoa Nibs

These roasted, crushed cacao beans are 100 percent cacao. They are often used as a topping or in baked goods for added texture and taste.

Cocoa Powder

This is also 100 percent cacao, which has been pressed to remove most of the cocoa butter and then ground into an unsweetened powder. It's used most often in baking and to make hot chocolate.

Dark Chocolate

It's generally at least 65 percent cacao and is used in baking and eaten as a treat.

Bittersweet or Semisweet Chocolate

These chocolates go by different names but are the same. They look like dark chocolate but can be as little as 35 percent cacao. They are used primarily in baking.

Milk Chocolate

This can be as low as 10 percent cacao, and it must contain at least 12 percent milk solids. While it may be lower in heavy metals than dark chocolate, it's higher in sugar. In addition to being a very popular type of chocolate, it's used in treats, frostings, and baked goods, and as an ice cream topper.

White Chocolate

Made with cocoa butter and milk solids, it tends to have more fat and sugar than dark chocolate. And because it contains no cocoa solids, it's likely to be low in heavy metals, but it's also likely to be low in heart-healthy flavanols. It's used to make fruity desserts, or it's eaten as a treat.

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: ADOBE STOCK. PHOTO, FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

BETTER WAYS TO EAT DARK CHOCOLATE

Calculating the exact amount of dark chocolate that's risky to eat is complicated. That's because heavy metal levels can vary, people have different risk levels, and chocolate is just one potential source of heavy metal exposure. But experts say that by being mindful of the risks, you can still enjoy dark chocolate while minimizing the potential harms.

Choose dark chocolates with the lowest levels of heavy metals.

CR's tests found five chocolates—one each from Mast, Taza, and Valrhona, and two from Ghirardelli—with relatively low levels of both lead and cadmium. Eight more are lower in only lead, and 10 others in just cadmium. Only five bars—one each from Green & Black's, Lily's, and Trader Joe's, and two from Theo—were higher for both heavy metals.

Treat chocolate as a treat.

A single ounce of even one of the chocolates with the highest cadmium and lead levels in CR's tests is unlikely to cause any immediate harm. The risk comes with frequent consumption over time. Heavy metals are also in certain other foods, including many that are more nutritious and important to eat as a regular parts of a healthy diet, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, and spinach. So it's best to eat dark chocolate only occasionally. "Having a serving a few days a week, especially with a product that has lower levels, means you can eat dark chocolate without worrying unduly," says CR's Tunde Akinleye, who oversaw the chocolate tests.

Try dark chocolates with lower cacao percentages.

If you're considering a bar that CR didn't test, so the heavy metal content is unknown, you may want to opt for a 70 percent dark chocolate product over an 80 percent one, for example, or a 65 percent bar over a 70 percent one. That's not a foolproof measure, but CR's tests, as well as testing done by other organizations, suggest that cadmium levels tend to increase with percentage of cacao. (Lead levels don't seem to be as closely tied to cacao percentage.)

Alternate with milk chocolate.

Cacao levels are lower in milk chocolate than in dark chocolate, so milk chocolate tends to have lower levels of heavy metals, says Michael J. DiBartolomeis, PhD, a toxicologist who has researched heavy metals in chocolate. But that doesn't mean you can eat it with abandon: It has a lot more added sugars. So it is best to eat both kinds of chocolates only occasionally, not every day.

Don't assume organic dark chocolates are safer.

In CR's tests, they were just as likely as other products to have concerning levels of heavy metals.

Don't give kids much dark chocolate.

Dark chocolate isn't a big hit with most kids, which is just as well, considering the younger you are, the bigger the threat from heavy metals. Pregnant people should limit consumption as well.

Think about your total chocolate consumption.

We did not test for heavy metals in cocoa powder, hot cocoa mixes, or other chocolate desserts. But they contain cocoa solids, too, so they could contribute to your heavy metal intake.

Eat a well-rounded diet.

Switching up the foods you eat may help you avoid overconsumption of heavy metals from other sources. Grapes, apples, green tea, and certain other healthy foods can even provide some of the same flavanols that chocolate supplies. Plus, doing this can help provide a variety of nutrients that may help offset some of the harm that heavy metals do. These include calcium, iron, selenium, vitamin C, and zinc.

CR'S GUIDE TO

Saving BIG

PAPER DISCOUNTS HAVE GIVEN WAY TO DIGITAL ONES AND

by Brian Vines • Illustrations by Sam Island

With Coupons

ONLINE LOYALTY PROGRAMS. HERE'S HOW TO CUT YOUR COSTS RIGHT NOW.

WHEN IT COMES TO ICE CREAM I am faithfully unfaithful to any single brand, especially if the price is right. Häagen-Dazs–yes. Ben & Jerry's–sure. Blue Bunny–bring it on. On the belief that no one should break their diet and the bank at the same time, when guilty pleasures are on special, I indulge.

So the moment I spotted the Stop & Shop circular featuring any variety of Breyers ice cream at two for $8, it was a done deal. Because the 48-ounce container is usually $5.99, I was staring down a savings of $1.99 each! The deal was further sweetened by a digital coupon that I, as a Stop & Shop GO Rewards member, could download right to my phone. Ninety-six ounces of ice cream for $7! Score!

BREYERS ICE CREAM AT STOP & SHOP

How Low Can You Go?

Saving a few dollars here and there on groceries may not quicken everyone's pulse. Even I will admit that managing piles of paper scraps or spending precious minutes uploading coupons before shopping might strike some as more effort than it's worth. But last year, just before Thanksgiving, my Stop & Shop receipt showed that I'd saved $581.63 so far in 2022–all before even buying one can of cranberry sauce. And that's just at one store, though we shop at several. Not bad for a family of two.

If in your efforts to get a deal you're relying solely on Sunday morning scissors sessions, you're missing out on an entire universe of deals. Indeed, the tools and techniques to maximize savings have evolved well beyond the circular. Today you can print coupons at home, download savings apps to your phone, and join store loyalty programs that grant access to sales and coupons that exist only in digital–not print–form. These discounts, which often must be digitally scanned at checkout, may be more targeted because they are based on your previous purchases, and come from retailers and manufacturers alike.

Perhaps because of this shift to digital, the number of paper coupons being issued has begun to decline. According to consulting company Kantar, 159 billion paper coupons were distributed in 2021, 12 percent fewer than the year before. Meanwhile, the number of digital coupons increased by 13 percent.

And yet, couponing in all its forms remains a popular pursuit–not to mention a critical tool as consumers need ways to counter inflation. Nearly a third of Americans say they use coupons frequently, and another 45 percent say they do so occasionally, according to an October 2022 nationally representative CR survey of 2,084 U.S. adults.

At the same time, CR's survey finds

that among people whose use of coupons has recently declined, the top reason is that they now see fewer paper coupons. To some, that raises concerns that digital discounts may disadvantage people who don't have access to connected devices, including low-income people and seniors on a fixed income, who may need discounts the most. Consumer advocates, including those at CR, are raising concerns that this digital divide hurts the most vulnerable shoppers.

Join the Club

When Coca-Cola created what may have been among the first paper coupons—handwritten slips "entitling the bearer" to a free glass of Coke in 1888—the company probably didn't know that its marketing ingenuity would revolutionize how other companies drive business.

For nearly a century after the introduction of S&H Green Stamps in 1896, they reigned supreme for many people. Though not coupons per se, shoppers could expect to be rewarded with little green stamps for patronizing shops in the S&H network, which they could then affix to collectors' books and redeem for premiums from an S&H Redemption Center or catalog.

While the Green Stamp era has passed, the idea of rewarding consumer loyalty is still going strong, with many grocery chains offering some version of a loyalty program. Customers at Publix stores, for example, can join "Club Publix," launched in 2020, and receive $5 off an in-store purchase of $20 or more. Members also get a peek at the weekly circular a day early and have access to digital coupons via the Publix mobile app.

Stop & Shop offers a two-tier loyalty program in its stores. Tier one is Stop & Shop Rewards, which offers weekly discounts online and at the register for items featured in the store's circular. Tier two offers members the opportunity to earn rewards and save on purchases with digital coupons via the Stop & Shop GO Rewards mobile app or website. Per Jensen, Stop & Shop's director of loyalty, says that the store can give bigger discounts with digital coupons because there are higher logistics costs when customers redeem paper versions.

A downside of digital deals is the contact information and data about your shopping behaviors that you give up for a discount. This may especially matter to you if you're already deluged by marketers, including scammy ones.

There are a couple of workarounds: A representative for Albertsons, one of the nation's largest food and drug retailers, says that people who may not have access to smartphones and mobile coupons or who want to avoid oversharing can request those discounts at the register. Stop & Shop informed CR of a pilot program to install kiosks in select stores where customers will be able to scan their physical rewards card or enter their phone number to access a small printed guide of the best circular offers and digital deals, no smartphones needed.

Speaking as someone who has reversed course halfway to the grocery store after realizing that I'd left my phone at home, I am firmly in the digital camp. But my ultimate allegiance is to the deal. If clipping coupons can also help me save money, I say pass the scissors.

Brian Vines is passionate about exploring equity in the marketplace, and finding the best deals.

THE NEW WAY TO COUPON

Couponing is a numbers game where time spent translates into savings earned. CR consulted with expert deal detectives to help you make the most of your time in the service of saving. Whether you have 30, 60, or 90 minutes a week to devote to couponing, these tips will help focus your efforts.

Start with the half-hour level suggestions, and if time permits, try incorporating techniques from the hourlong and 90-minute couponing tips.

30 MINUTES

- **Join rewards and loyalty programs at your favorite stores.** Albertsons, Safeway, and Vons share a loyalty program that features $5 welcome savings off a $25 in-store purchase at sign-up. Members earn a point for every dollar spent on groceries. Every 100 points earns a Reward. And 10 Rewards equals $15 off your entire grocery purchase. Pro tip: You can supercharge those savings while keeping your grocery budget in check by purchasing a store gift card that allows you to earn 2 points for every dollar spent on groceries.

- **Buy a Sunday newspaper to get the coupon inserts.** Yes, it can still pay to go old school. So search the insert for coupons for products you regularly use that you wouldn't substitute for cheaper

or generic options. If you find a coupon for one of your must-have items, consider purchasing a second paper to double down on any buy one, get one deals.

● **Use coupon "matchups."**
Some retailers allow you to do coupon matchups, which allow you to save more by combining store-offered discounts with matching manufacturer coupons. For example, if the CVS circular features Bounty paper towels at two for $5, a manufacturer's coupon for the same product would be a matchup. To find them, do an online search of a store where you shop and add the word "matchup." Deal bloggers such as For The Mommas and The Krazy Coupon Lady create weekly store deal/coupon breakdowns. Most will help you find the coupons that match up to the products.

● **Give yourself coupon reminders.**
Try whatever method helps you remember to bring coupons when you shop. Use your phone's voice memo option, set calendar alerts for dates when things you want go on sale, or just put sticky notes on your refrigerator.

● **Set a grocery budget and stick with it.**
Many people can't resist a good deal and load their carts with extraneous items they don't really need. Make sure the lure of a bargain doesn't prompt you to spend more than you budget for your weekly or monthly grocery shopping. Shop from a list so that you buy only those things on it.

60 MINUTES

● **Watch coupon update videos on YouTube.**
Searching terms like "deals this week" or "coupon with me" will yield videos created by super-couponers like Star Smith (see "How to 'Stack' Your Coupons," at right), who offers weekly 10- to 25-minute store-specific deal updates, with tips on how to maximize them with manufacturer coupons. National retailers like CVS, Target, and Walgreens are the subject of the largest number of videos, but you will also find updates for local and regional retailers.

● **Remember that receipts are currency.**
Use rebate apps like Fetch Rewards and Ibotta to take in-app pictures of your cash register receipts to earn points that you can convert to Visa gift cards. Fetch gives subscribers a minimum of 25 points for every receipt that they upload. Users receive bonus points by buying specific items from a rotating list of manufacturers. For example, Bayer recently offered 1,500 bonus points if you bought at least one bottle of Bayer Cardio 50-count-plus low-dose aspirin. For 11,500 points, app users can get a $10 Visa Prepaid Card. A $50 Visa card requires a 52,500-point cash-out.

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Where the Wild Deals Are

Great ways to save using the apps of some major retailers:

WALMART: The nation's largest retailer will price match against itself. Scan an item at the store using the Walmart app, then hit the walmart.com tab next to the "at your store" tab. If the walmart.com price is lower, the Walmart store will honor the online price.

TARGET: The mega retailer's rewards program gives 1 percent cash back for every eligible purchase online, in-store, or via the Target app, to be used for future purchases. Membership also includes 5 percent off a single purchase on your birthday if you provide that date.

DOLLAR GENERAL: This discount chain—with nearly 19,000 stores in 47 states—offers $5 off a $25 purchase each Saturday that can be redeemed via the DG app or from the bottom of a printed receipt.

MCDONALD'S: The fast-food giant's app grants points for drive-thru, counter, in-app, and kiosk orders, redeemable for free food. For example, 3,000 points gets you a free six-piece McNuggets. Spending $1 using the mobile "order & pay" purchase feature scores a free medium fries every Friday.

KOHL'S: The Kohl's Rewards program gives 5 percent cash back on every purchase, which you can eventually use for future purchases. When used in-store, the app applies all available store and personal discounts to the item scanned. The store also designates certain weeks "Kohl's Cash Earning Periods," when shoppers can earn $10 Kohl's Cash for every $50 spent (Kohl's Cash can't be used to purchase Sephora products). Kohl's shoppers ages 60 and older enjoy a 15 percent discount on in-store purchases on Wednesdays. The same offer applies to members of the military, regardless of age, on Mondays.

HOW TO 'STACK' YOUR COUPONS

STAR SMITH HAS been a serious couponer since 2010. So serious, in fact, that she was able to pull off zero-dollar supermarket sweeps like the kind you may remember seeing on TV. Although savings are less steep now, Star says she still believes in couponing's value. "If you dedicate an hour a week to couponing, without even trying too hard, you can get $50 back into your budget," she says.

Today, the Atlanta-area content creator teaches her 200,000-plus YouTube subscribers how to do just that on her channel, "couponwithStar." Her weekly videos break down the best deals from retailers like CVS and Walgreens and preach the gospel of "stacking"—using multiple paper or digital coupons on items. (Some retailers limit how many coupons can be used for a single item or order.) In two October videos, Smith walked fans through two sample deals, one for coupon newbies using digital coupons available through the CVS Extra Care app, and another for more dedicated couponers.

Stacking for Beginners

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Smartphone with CVS Extra Care membership app

THE PURCHASE

2	Colgate Optic White Stain Fighter toothpaste, 4.2 oz.	$4.99 each	$9.98

COUPONS APPLIED

1	Spend $10, get back $5	**CVS Extra Care Digital Deal** clipped on phone	- $5.00
1	Save $4 on 2 Colgate products	**CVS Extra Care app** digital coupon	- $4.00
1	Save $1 on 1 Colgate product	**CVS Extra Care app** digital coupon	- $1.00

FINAL COST

CASH PAID **$0.00**

Advanced Stacking

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Manufacturer coupons (MFC), coupons printed on the end of your cash register tape receipt (CRT), in-app CVS coupons, and rewards through the Ibotta rebate app

THE PURCHASE

3	Revlon Ultra HD Vinyl Lip Polish	$12.49 each	$37.47
2	Revlon Colorstay Prep & Protect Primer/Base	$17.49 each	$34.98
1	Revlon New Complexion One-Step Compact Makeup Foundation	$16.79	$16.79
	TOTAL VALUE		**$89.24**

COUPONS APPLIED*

3	$2 off Revlon lip cosmetics	**Manufacturer Coupons**	- $6.00
3	$3 off Revlon face cosmetics	**Manufacturer Coupons**	- $9.00
4	Buy 2, get 1 free coupons	**Cash Register Tape Coupons**	- $49.26
1	$4 off $20 worth of Revlon products	**Digital Coupon**	- $4.00

FINAL COST

$20.98

CVS Extra Bucks accrued from previous purchases — - $20.00

CASH PAID **98¢**

REBATES

Revlon spend $15, get $5 Extra Bucks reward, limit six	**In-Store Promotion**	**+ $20.00** Extra Bucks
Submitted receipt to Ibotta		**+ $12.00** Rebate
MONEY BACK FOR FUTURE PURCHASES		**$31.02**

**This deal required the assistance of a cashier because the maximum value of some of the coupons is $18, a value that triggers the self-checkout system to stop.*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46

● **Find a Facebook couponing group.** Typing "couponing group" into the social media platform's search bubble will have you scrolling through groups with as many as 1½ million followers. You can narrow your search by utilizing the city filter under the groups icon. Shoppers in your area may have tips on local retailers and news about nearby unadvertised spot sales.

● **Subscribe to a coupon provider.** Depending on where you live, that can be cheaper than buying a Sunday newspaper. Coupon clipping services, also called coupon fairies, like The Coupon Marketplace, post images of paper coupons you can buy. A coupon on the site for $2 off any one Nature's Bounty Vitamin was on sale for 20 cents. The cheapest shipping option was USPS first-class mail for $1, which makes sense when you buy coupons in one or more bundles of 10. Pro tip: The coupon values in newspaper inserts can vary by region, even if they are offered by the same manufacturer. That 50 cents offer in Pennsylvania may be worth 75 cents in Texas. Coupon fairies in different regions have access to inserts you may not. The Sunday Coupon Inserts website offers a subscription service that will ship whole inserts from companies like Procter & Gamble or SmartSource. The December P&G insert featured $82 worth of coupons on everything from $10 off Olay Regenerist Facial Moisturizers to 50 cents off any Pepto-Bismol product.

90 MINUTES

● **Join a manufacturer's email list.** Procter & Gamble has 65 brands across 10 product categories and will send you weekly coupons and free offers via its P&G Good Everyday rewards program that you can print at home. Kimberly-Clark, the producer of brands like Kleenex and Huggies, has email sign-up prompts on the websites of individual brands like Scott tissue that will deliver deal offers to your inbox. Beech-Nut will email coupon sets to those who request them. On the site, parents can receive discounts for up to five little ones. PepsiCo's Tasty Rewards will mail members up to 10 coupons of their choice. The program offers a print-at-home option and will load digital coupons to retailers Publix and Family Dollar for Frito-Lay and Pepsi products.

● **Contact the manufacturers of your favorite brands and ask for coupons.** Many will oblige with high-value coupons, perhaps for staples you like or for new products to try. I went to the Chobani yogurt website, navigated to customer care, and clicked the connect button that produced a contact form with a message field. I wrote that Chobani is one of my favorite brands but lately I've been buying whatever is on sale. I fished by asking whether they could share any coupons. About a week later four coupons arrived, and two of them were for free yogurt!

More Insider Tips

Stores have unique policies governing coupons and other discounts. Here are some noteworthy highlights:

No-Coupon Policies
Whether it's because the stores' prices are rock bottom already or they offer other discount programs, your manufacturer coupons are no good at Aldi, Costco, Fresh Direct, and Sam's Club.

Senior Discounts
Fred Meyer, Harris Teeter, Hy-Vee, New Seasons Market, Piggly Wiggly, and Walgreens sometimes offer senior discounts of 5 to 10 percent on many items on certain days of the week or month. Ask your local store for specifics.

Drive-Up Discounts
At Albertsons, Giant Eagle, Kroger, Meijer, Publix, and Target, you may not have to step foot in the store to redeem printed or digital coupons because they will accept them during curbside pick-up transactions. Call ahead for details.

Dollar Deals
Dollar Tree will accept a single manufacturer's coupon per item purchased in-store, including on buy one, get one free offers. Dollar General issues its own coupons and accepts manufacturers' coupons, and allows stacking in certain situations.

Coupon Doubling
Harris Teeter will double a manufacturer's coupon up to 99 cents. Stop & Shop does the same for customers who use its loyalty card.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

SAFETY MATTERS

Crash Detection

The Apple iPhone 14 and the Google Pixel now have crash detection technology that senses whether you've been in an accident and will call for help for you. But buying a new phone isn't the only way to get this potentially lifesaving service. If you drive a newer vehicle, chances are it can already call for help after a crash (check your owner's manual to see whether yours does and how to activate it). Owners of older cars can pay for a third-party crash notification service, either as a phone app or a plug-in device. While some insurance companies, including Progressive and USAA, also offer free smartphone apps that provide a similar service, these may share your location and driving habits with your insurer.

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

Safer Driving at Dusk

Dusk is a dangerous time to drive because you may not be aware of how much visibility has eroded before you think to turn on the headlights. For safety:

Put your headlights on automatic if your car has this feature.

Use your fog lights. These small lamps under the headlights illuminate the road just ahead of you, and help you to be seen by other drivers.

Turn down the dash lights. A brightly lit instrument panel can cause glare that cuts visibility.

Don't rely on pedestrian detection. Some automatic braking systems have trouble detecting pedestrians in the dark.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Cars That Can't Speed

It's a fact of life that drivers don't always obey posted speed limits. Now some auto manufacturers are installing what are called speed limiters in cars to prevent them from going as fast as they otherwise could. The goal is to reduce speed-related car crashes or their severity. For instance, Volvos have a speed limit of 112 mph, and the new Polestar 3—related to the Volvo brand—will be limited to 130 mph. In a September 2022 nationally representative CR survey of 2,519 U.S. adults, we asked what the maximum speed should be if vehicles were to come with speed limiters installed. Sixty-eight percent chose as their maximum 100 mph or below.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

11 MILLION

The number of defective Takata airbags that still need to be replaced, of the approximately 67 million installed in 34 brands, including Ford, GM, and Toyota. Car owners are strongly advised to check whether their vehicle is part of the recall (nhtsa.gov/recalls) and, if so, to have the airbags replaced.

RECALL

Audi/Volkswagen

Volkswagen Group of America is recalling nearly 225,000 cars and SUVs to fix a faulty tire pressure monitoring system that may too slowly detect tire pressure loss if all four tires lose pressure at once. Recalled vehicles from the 2019 to 2021 model years include certain Audi A3 and Q3 and Volkswagen Atlas, Atlas Cross Sport, Golf, Golf Alltrack, and Tiguan models. **WHAT TO DO:** Dealerships will perform a free software update that fixes the problem. For more information, contact Audi at 800-253-2834 and Volkswagen at 800-893-5298.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

New Car Features We Love

(and Some We Don't)

Cars you can unlock with your phone, cameras that can see where you can't, and high beams that turn on by themselves. We've got the cool new tech to seek out on your next car.

by Keith Barry

WHETHER YOU'RE BUYING a car for the first time in a dozen years or replacing a 3-year-old leased model, you might find yourself in an alien landscape the next time you go to a dealership. That's because there have been a lot of aesthetic and technological transformations that are affecting not just how today's cars work but also how drivers interact with them.

For example, even basic economy cars on the market now have convenient features like high-beam headlights that automatically turn themselves on and off, and in-car screens that pair with your phone to display navigation apps and play music from your favorite playlists.

But some changes might have you looking back at your old car with nostalgia. Touchscreens where buttons used to be, low-profile tires that make for a harsh ride, and confusing gear selectors and electronic door handles are becoming the norm on many of today's vehicles.

How do you know which features you should look for, which to avoid, and which you might just have to get used to? We're here to help. CR buys about 40 new vehicles each year for our auto test program. After our on-the-track evaluations are complete, we continue to live with the cars for few months longer, using them the same way you would–picking up kids, hauling groceries, carrying bikes to trails, and more. In other words, we notice how various features enhance or diminish the car-owning experience.

These are the most interesting new car trends we've come across on the latest vehicles we've tested. You'll encounter many of them on your next vehicle. Some we like. Some, not so much.

ADVANCES TO LOOK FOR

2023 **Hyundai Elantra**
Starting at $20,500

Automatic high-beam headlights are standard.

2023 **Nissan Rogue**
Starting at $27,360

Car advertisements and salespeople will try to convince you that the more features a car has, the more luxurious it is. But we believe that the true measure of luxury isn't how much equipment a car has; it's how much the features can reduce the driver's stress level. A car that is easy to operate provides a superior experience. The Hyundai Elantra and Nissan Rogue—both budget-friendly models—are good examples of cars that get it right. Both have useful, modern comfort and convenience features (some standard, others optional) that prioritize ease of use.

The horn honks when the right pressure is reached during tire inflation.

Smartphone apps can open and start the car and lend a virtual key to another driver.

Smartphone apps can locate the car.

They're equipped with wireless charging and wireless Apple CarPlay.

The trunk opens when you stand near it with a key fob.

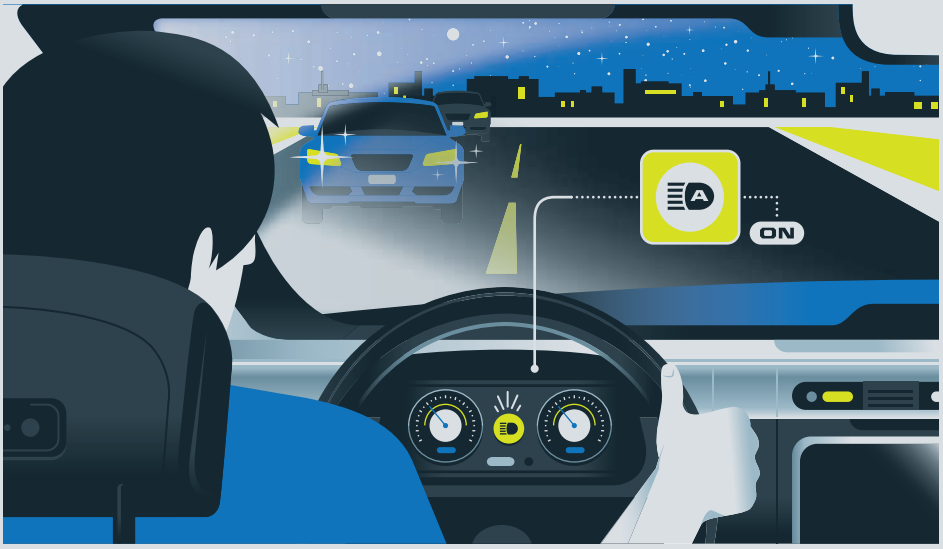
AUTOMATIC HIGH BEAMS

These headlights automatically switch between high and low beams based on lighting, traffic, and speed, to add illumination when needed without shining glare into the eyes of other drivers. You can override them if you want to.

OUR OPINION "Even if it's optional, we recommend paying extra for this feature," says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at CR's Auto Test Center. "That's how useful we think it is." Several years ago, AAA found that even though high beams can extend your nighttime vision, 64 percent of drivers who drive at night said they don't use them regularly. This tech solves that problem by turning the high beams on and off for you.

BUYING TIPS Your owner's manual will explain how to engage the automatic high beams. Usually, an "A" or "Auto" will illuminate within the headlight symbol behind the steering wheel when it's active.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM It's available on almost all new cars, as either standard or optional equipment.



2023 **TESLA MODEL 3**

FLUSH OR ELECTRONIC DOOR HANDLES

Certain newer vehicles have door handles that retract when not in use, a design that reduces aerodynamic drag and improves fuel economy or electric driving range.

OUR OPINION They can be hard to grasp and complicate what should be a simple feature. They can also ice over more easily than regular handles.

BUYING TIPS Some high-end trim packages come with motorized handles that extend automatically from the door when you approach the vehicle. But such a complex design could break.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM They're found on vehicles from Kia, Tesla, and others, and are especially common on EVs.

TIRE PRESSURE WARNING AND MONITORING SYSTEMS

Tire pressure monitoring systems (TPMSs) that alert you with a warning light if your tires are underinflated have been required on all new cars sold in the U.S. since September 2007. Many cars go a step beyond, showing real-time tire pressure for each tire while you drive, typically on a dashboard screen. A few cars will even help guide you through inflation, honking the horn once your tires have reached their correct pressure, so you can leave your tire pressure gauge in the glove box.

OUR OPINION "Proper tire inflation is key for safety, fuel economy, and even tire wear," says Ryan Pszczolkowski, tire program manager at CR. "The ability to see the pressure per tire and for the car to let you know when a tire is inflated to the correct pressure is a nice convenience."

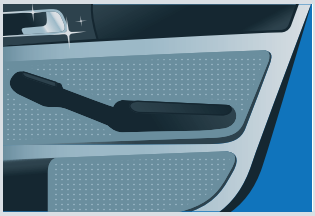
THE NISSAN TIRE MONITORING DISPLAY

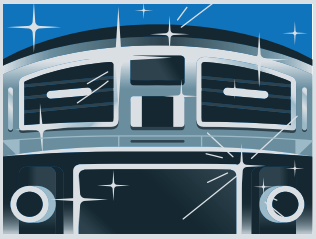
BUYING TIPS Read the owner's manual to familiarize yourself with how these features work and to make sure they're user-friendly.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Real-time pressure monitoring is available on most cars with high-level trim packages. Certain vehicles from GM, Jeep, and Nissan will honk the horn once during filling when your tires have reached the correct pressure.

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: HYUNDAI; NISSAN. PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: TESLA; NISSAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE





SOFT-TO-THE-TOUCH SURFACES AND REFLECTIVE INTERIOR TRIM

You might not think about cleaning and glare while admiring an attractive car interior at the dealership, but the shiny black interior trim that's now in fashion easily scratches, collects dust, and shows fingerprints. Chrome and silver accents can reflect sunlight into the eyes of drivers. Plush, heavily padded dashboards and armrests can collect and hold dust.

OUR OPINION Glossy trim is too easy to scratch and doesn't belong in often-touched areas, like near the center console or on the door handle.

BUYING TIPS Even on cars that offer multiple interior trim options, it can be hard for buyers to avoid silvery accents and padding. If your new car has soft-touch surfaces, clean them with a microfiber cloth to avoid leaving lint behind.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Almost every mainstream car has these trims today.

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LINCOLN; CHRYSLER; HONDA; NISSAN

2023 **LINCOLN CORSAIR** The Lincoln's shifter is almost impossible to operate without looking.

2023 **CHRYSLER PACIFICA** The volume and shifter knobs are very close and can be mistaken.

2023 **NISSAN PATHFINDER** The shift lever is intuitive and won't be confused with other controls.

2023 **HONDA ODYSSEY** It lets you shift without taking your eyes off the road.

NEW WAYS OF SHIFTING GEARS

Automakers have increasingly replaced the familiar "P-R-N-D-L" shift lever with buttons, dials, or monostable selectors, which move like a joystick and return to the center position when released. Some cars even have separate buttons to engage Park. While some of these setups are as intuitive as traditional ones, others require drivers to pay close attention or risk selecting Reverse or Neutral when they want Drive.

OUR OPINION Some alternatives are fine: We're fans of knobs when they're easy to use without looking at them, but we're not fans at all when they can easily be mistaken for a different control, as with the volume knob in Chrysler Pacificas and the infotainment screen controller in Genesis vehicles. In a 2020 survey, some CR members whose cars had monostable or push-button selectors said that they were likely to select the wrong gear, change the gear by accident, or take their eyes off the road to change gears.

BUYING TIPS Try doing a three-point turn in the parking lot of a dealership to see how easy it is to change from Reverse to Drive and back again. Then put the car into Park.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Most, though unfamiliar gear selectors are more likely to show up in hybrids and EVs than other models. Luxury brands scored the worst in our gear selector survey.

2022 **RIVIAN R1T**

DO-IT-ALL TOUCHSCREENS

Step inside a newer car and you're more likely to see a tabletlike interface mounted on the dashboard than buttons and knobs. As cars get more features, a touchscreen allows automakers to hide infrequently changed settings—such as switching from miles to kilometers—in digital menus instead of cluttering up the dashboard. But some automakers have gone too far, moving controls for often-used features such as radios, climate controls, and even windshield wipers to touchscreens.

OUR OPINION Touchscreens are fine, but physical controls are best for frequently used features, such as climate and volume. "Screens aren't conducive to making small adjustments to volume or temperature, unlike hard controls you can grab without looking," says Kelly Funkhouser, CR's head of connected and automated vehicles.

BUYING TIPS On your test drive, try to change the radio station and turn on the heat or A/C. Adjust the audio volume and the temperature to see how easy these common tasks are before you buy the car.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Most brands have touchscreens, but luxury brands and higher trim levels tend to have larger screens and fewer traditional buttons and knobs.

2022 **FORD EXPEDITION**

PHONE APPS ON YOUR DASHBOARD

Android Auto and Apple CarPlay allow you to access some smartphone apps and voice assistants on the vehicle's infotainment screen.

OUR OPINION Phone-based apps are often easier to use than a car's built-in navigation or infotainment.

BUYING TIPS To go cord-free, look for wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, along with a wireless charging pad. Toyota was a late adopter, so even newer used models might not have this feature.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Android Auto and Apple CarPlay are standard on almost all new cars except Rivians and Teslas.

KEYLESS OR PHONE-BASED ENTRY AND GO

These days, few cars still offer a physical key that turns in the door lock or ignition. Instead, they have key fobs that let you open the door (known as "keyless entry") and start the car ("keyless go") as long as the fob is with you. You may need to press a button on the door, or it may automatically unlock as soon as your hand reaches or pulls on the handle.

OUR OPINION Going keyless is especially convenient in the rain, or if your keys have a habit of falling deep into your handbag or backpack. Many cars with key fobs can prevent you from locking your keys in the car, and some can be programmed to automatically lock once you've stepped away from the vehicle.

BUYING TIPS You may have to pay extra if you want your doors to unlock when your hand is close to the handle or if you want keyless entry on more than just the driver's door.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE IT In the past few years, keyless entry and go have become standard on all but base-model economy cars. Certain vehicles from BMW, Ford, Genesis, Hyundai, Kia, and Tesla allow you to use your smartphone as a key in place of a fob, which can save room in your pocket or purse.

PHOTOS: RIVIAN; FORD

CAMERA VISION

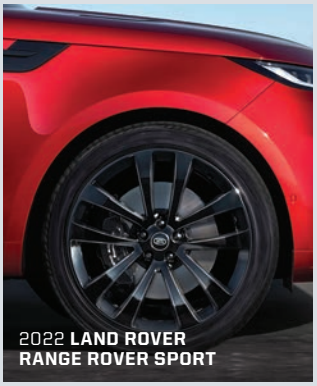
Backup cameras have been mandatory on all new passenger vehicles since May 2018. But in some cases, the center infotainment screen will offer multiple views around the car—including close-ups on the wheels and fenders—and sometimes a 360-degree surround view that can feel like part of a video game.

OUR OPINION We love cameras on cars. Modern cars can have big blind spots, and cameras can help you see what you otherwise could not. In addition to preventing parking lot mishaps, front-view and backup cameras can prevent tragedies, especially because children can be too small to be seen over the hood of a vehicle or out the rear window. And side-view cameras can help you parallel park closer to the curb.

BUYING TIPS Try out the various camera views in a parking lot during your test drive to make sure they're easy to use. Be mindful that higher-quality cameras will provide a better image in low light.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE IT Backup cameras are standard on all new cars. You will usually have to pay extra for front-, side-, or surround-view cameras, which are available on most larger and luxury vehicles.

PHOTO: LAND ROVER



2022 **LAND ROVER RANGE ROVER SPORT**

LARGER WHEELS AND TIRES

Massive 19-, 20-, or even 21-inch wheels may look cool, but in our testing we repeatedly find that those larger, heavier wheels—and the low-profile sidewalls that often go with them—tend to give drivers a harsher ride and risk both tire and wheel damage from potholes. That's because short tire sidewalls can't absorb bumps and other road imperfections as well as regular tires. They're great for high-performance driving but not for comfort on your daily commute. And tires that fit those larger wheels typically cost more to replace.

OUR OPINION Skip them if you can. You'll save money and get a better ride.

BUYING TIPS Many automakers bundle bigger wheels and tires with option packages aimed at drivers who want sportier handling or more luxurious trim levels. Ask your dealer whether smaller wheels come with the options you want.

WHICH BRANDS HAVE THEM Almost every manufacturer has bigger wheel and tire options. Luxury SUVs, such as those from BMW, Cadillac, and Land Rover, are more likely to have the largest wheels.

How to Finance a Used Car

BUYING A USED car can be a lot less expensive than buying new, especially as used-car prices begin to ease. But those savings can quickly evaporate if you need to finance your purchase. Interest rates for used cars can be twice what you would pay to finance a new car, which means you could be shelling out thousands of dollars more. In fact, financing a late-model used car could make it almost as expensive as buying new. "Used-car prices today remain pretty elevated, so it's a good idea to avoid high-cost financing and dealer extras," says Chuck Bell, a financial policy advocate for CR. "You may save by arranging your own financing rather than going through the dealer. And consider buying from a private seller. It can be more of a hassle, but you may end up paying less." The following tips will help you get the best price when financing a used car.

GET PREAPPROVED

This is good advice for any car purchase, and it's essential if you're financing a used car bought from a private seller. Getting preapproved also gives you a baseline to start comparing rates and empowers you to decline a dealer's financing if the terms aren't favorable. Be sure to shop around. Online vendors like Carvana and Vroom offer online prequalification, but you may get a better rate from your own bank or credit union.

TIP: Don't worry about making multiple inquiries for auto loans. They may be excluded from your credit report. If not, they're likely counted only as one inquiry if they're all made within the same 30-day period.

AVOID LONG-TERM LOANS

A 60-month loan may keep monthly payments low, but you'll pay more in interest over time and probably also pay a higher rate. Using recent Navy Federal Credit Union interest rates as an example, you could finance $23,000 at 5.44 percent over 36 months for a total of $24,980. A 60-month loan would incur a higher 5.74 percent rate and an overall payment $1,500 higher than the shorter-term loan.

TIP: Choose the shortest loan term you can afford. This will minimize interest payments and reduce the likelihood that you'll find yourself "upside down," or owing more on the loan than the car is worth.

SAY NO TO DEALER ADD-ONS

Once you've agreed on a price, the dealer may try to persuade you to buy an extended warranty. Don't consider it before making sure the original factory warranty has expired. Some certified pre-owned (CPO) cars carry extended coverage and may not need more. Buying an extended warranty is usually not worth the money. Choosing a car known for reliability is a better investment.

TIP: Start a rainy day fund for maintenance. That money could earn a little interest if it's in the right type of account, and you can apply what you don't use to the purchase of your next car.

FACTOR IN REPAIR COSTS

If you're buying an older vehicle, you'll definitely save money over the price of a new car. But don't forget the inevitable cost of replacement tires or a brake job, depending on the model and its age and history.

TIP: Choosing a model from CR's list of recommended used cars (CR.org/usedcar) may help limit repair costs. Whichever car you choose, come up with a rough annual budget for upkeep by using our guidelines on car maintenance (CR.org/200K) and our repair estimator (CR.org/carrepair). Add that to the estimated annual cost to finance the car to find out how much money you'll actually save by buying used.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

Ford F-150 Lightning

Quicker, Quieter, and More Comfortable

65
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 89

HIGHS Acceleration, quietness, roomy cab, front trunk, rides better than regular F-150, no emissions

LOWS Distracting infotainment system, long stopping distances

POWERTRAIN 580-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

RANGE 320 miles

PRICE $51,974-$96,874 base price + $1,795 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $80,889

THE LIGHTNING IS Ford's first fully electric pickup. In many ways it looks and feels like a regular F-150, except it has blistering acceleration, a more comfortable ride, and a large front trunk. It managed an impressively high road-test score compared with other pickups—including the Rivian R1T—but the Lightning's Overall Score is hurt by its below-average predicted reliability.

The optional extended-range battery on our tested truck increases the driving range from 240 to 320 miles. Mash the throttle pedal and the 580-hp Lightning takes off with seat-pinning force yet also plenty of grip, thanks to standard all-wheel drive.

Ford says the Lightning's huge, 131-kilowatt-hour battery will need 10 hours to charge at home on a 240-volt system, and 44 minutes to go from a 15 percent charge to 80 percent at public DC fast chargers. Although the Lightning is rated at a stout 10,000-pound towing capacity, hauling a heavy trailer will slash the range.

Thanks to an independent rear suspension with coil springs, the ride is much smoother than the regular F-150's. Slow steering and clumsy handling remain, but the rear of the truck stays better planted over bumps. Stopping distances are long, even compared with full-sized trucks—that's disconcerting, given how quickly the Lightning can gain speed.

AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, reverse automatic emergency braking, LDW, and LKA come standard. Ford's BlueCruise active driving assistance feature is optional, combining adaptive cruise control, lane centering assistance, and direct driver monitoring.

LUXURY ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Audi Q4 E-Tron

Refined, Pleasant-Driving Electric SUV

67
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

HIGHS Quiet cabin, quick acceleration, seat comfort, fit and finish, no tailpipe emissions

LOWS Spongy brake pedal, unlit climate controls

POWERTRAIN 295-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

RANGE 241 miles

PRICE $48,800-$64,900 base price + $1,195 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $60,580

AUDI'S Q4 E-TRON electric SUV shares its platform with Volkswagen's ID.4, but it feels like an Audi through and through. It's quick and quiet, and has a well-finished cabin without the indulgent, newfangled controls found in some other EVs.

Front and rear motors give the Q4 all-wheel drive, while 295 electric ponies make it pretty quick—despite weighing about 500 pounds more than the larger Audi Q7. Its EPA-rated 241-mile driving range is competitive but far from class-leading. To its credit, Audi supplies a special heavy-duty plug that's compatible with an outlet similar to that of an oven or a dryer, potentially eliminating the need to buy a home charger.

Handling is responsive and capable, up to a point: Don't expect Q3- or Q5-like agility when you push the pace through turns. The ride is steady and composed most of the time, but the suspension feels overly firm when driving on rough pavement at low speeds, such as in a city.

We don't like that the brake pedal feels as if you're pressing on a sponge when trying to stop. Audi also didn't give the Q4 true "one-pedal driving," which would allow drivers to slow to a stop purely by using regenerative braking. But we appreciate the ability to adjust the regen-level with paddles behind the steering wheel.

The front seats are comfortable, with long-lasting support, and the rear seat has good head- and knee room. We think it's inexcusable, though, that some of the climate-control toggle switches are unlit at night.

AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, reverse automatic emergency braking, LDW, and LKA all come standard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **FCW** forward collision warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

SPORTS CARS

Subaru BRZ

A Thrill Ride Perfect for Twisty Two-Lane Roads

78
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

HIGHS Satisfying ride/handling balance, braking, acceleration, controls

LOWS Noisy cabin, compromised outward views, difficult to get in and out, minuscule rear seat

POWERTRAIN 228-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine; 6-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive

FUEL 28 mpg on premium

PRICE $28,595-$32,795 base price + $1,020 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $32,115

THE FORMULA REMAINS unchanged for the redesigned, second-generation BRZ: This small, nimble rear-drive sports coupe is all about driving fun at a modest price.

As before, the BRZ is a near-twin to the Toyota GR86, with one important difference: The BRZ's ride, while still very firm, doesn't beat you up with the constant harshness and bone-jarring character of the Toyota that gets old quickly. Yet the BRZ's handling is pinpoint-precise, with a taut suspension, quick reflexes, and a forgiving nature when driven to its limits. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more alluring car to drive down a twisty two-lane road.

Like the GR86, the new BRZ benefits from a larger four-cylinder engine. It produces considerably more power down low in the revs than before, which makes it easier to drive. A six-speed automatic transmission is available, but we prefer the direct driver experience of the six-speed manual, which engages each gear with a satisfying feel.

While the ride is absorbent enough to qualify the BRZ for daily-driver duty, there's an unrelenting barrage of tire rumble and engine drone that's bound to get tiresome on longer highway drives. Getting in and out of this small, low-slung machine can be viewed as either a chore or part of your daily exercise routine.

At least the controls are simple, with an easy-to-use infotainment touchscreen plus physical buttons and knobs for the climate system that are intuitive to operate while driving.

It's disappointing that only the versions with the optional automatic transmission get FCW, AEB, and LDW.

FIRST DRIVE

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs

Lexus RX

Delightful Hybrid Powertrain but Frustrating Controls

WE LIKE Hybrid powertrain, comfortable seats, roomy driving position, quality fit and finish

WE DON'T LIKE Distracting controls, unintuitive gear selector, annoying electronic door releases

POWERTRAIN 366-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 27 mpg combined (estimate)

PRICE $49,000-$61,600 base price + $1,150 destination charge
Total MSRP as driven $71,770

NOW ENTERING ITS fifth generation, the redesigned RX remains one of the most comfortable and refined luxury midsized SUVs you can buy. The four new powertrains all use turbo four-cylinders or some form of hybridization; the long-serving V6 is gone. We rented a pre-production RX500h F Sport from Lexus, ahead of purchasing an RX350 and RX350h for our test program. Here are our first impressions.

There's plenty of giddyup from the RX500h's combination of a 2.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine and a two-motor electric drive system, with a supersmooth-shifting six-speed automatic. You'd swear there's no way this thing is "just a four-cylinder."

The F Sport's driver-adjustable adaptive suspension soaked up most bumps well, even handling sharp potholes with minimal drama. But though this is an F Sport, it comes up short on driver engagement through turns compared with rivals like the Audi Q7, BMW X5, or Genesis GV80.

The cabin is loaded with high-quality materials, and it has comfortable seats front and rear, along with a roomy driving position free of intrusions. However, when it comes to infotainment interfaces, Lexus just can't get it right. The new touchscreen is an improvement in general functionality and usability over the two previous RX systems, but we don't like that the setup consolidates media and climate controls into a single screen, or that some relatively simple tasks require multiple steps.

All RXs come standard with AEB with pedestrian and motorcycle detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **FCW** forward collision warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **Full Range** This month we look at a redesigned sports car that can spark you to go out for a drive, plus two EVs—a burly pickup truck and a handsome compact SUV.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features		
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW + RCTW
SPORTS CARS $25,000-$35,000																		
✓ **Mini Cooper S** 2.0T	82	⇈	!	80	30	320	^ / ⇊	!	!	!	^	⇈	56.0	7.2	130	S	–	–
✓ **Subaru BRZ** 2.4L	78	!	⇈	86	27	360	^ / ⇊	⇈	v	!	!	⇈	60.0	6.3	117	O	O	O
✓ **BMW 230i** 2.0T	77	!	^	85	31	425	⇈ / ⇊	!	^	!	^	⇈	56.0	6.4	128	S	O	S
✓ **Toyota GR86** 2.4L	76	!	⇈	83	28	375	^ / ⇊	⇈	v	v	!	⇈	59.0	6.3	119	O	O	O
✓ **Honda Civic Si** 1.5T	74	^	!	74	32	390	^ / ^	⇈	v	v	^	⇈	57.5	7.3	134	S	S	O
Volkswagen Golf GTI 2.0T	65	v	!	85	28	365	^ / !	⇊	^	!	^	⇈	56.0	6.4	127	S	S	S
Subaru WRX 2.4T	63	v	^	83	25	420	^ / !	^	v	v	!	⇈	59.0	5.8	124	O	O	O
ELECTRIC VEHICLES $45,000-$65,000																		
✓ **Kia EV6** E	91	⇈	⇈	90	105 ①	282	^ / !	!	⇈	^	^	⇈	54.5	4.7	126	S	S	S
✓ **Genesis GV60** E	84	!	⇈	91	95 ①	248	^ / ^	!	⇈	^	⇈	^	54.5	5.1	131	S	S	S
✓ **Tesla Model 3** E	78	!	^	82	130 ①	358	⇈ / v	⇊	!	v	^	⇈	55.0	5.3	133	S	S	–
✓ **Hyundai Ioniq 5** E	76	!	⇈	91	98 ①	256	^ / ^	!	⇈	^	^	^	53.0	4.7	131	S	S	S
Tesla Model Y E	73	v	⇈	90	121 ①	330	⇈ / ^	⇊	^	v	^	⇈	54.5	4.7	121	S	S	–
Audi Q4 E-Tron E	67	v	^	86	95 ①	241	⇈ / ^	!	⇈	!	^	^	52.5	5.9	133	S	S	S
Ford Mustang Mach-E E	66	v	⇈	78	90 ①	290	^ / ^	!	⇈	!	^	⇈	52.0	5.3	136	S	S	S
Volkswagen ID.4 E	65	v	^	83	93 ①	255	⇈ / ^	⇊	⇈	^	^	^	52.5	5.8	134	S	S	S
Polestar 2 E	53	v	⇈	72	89 ①	260	^ / v	⇊	^	v	^	^	55.5	4.4	123	S	S	O
FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS																		
✓ **Ram 1500** 5.7L	68	!	^	83	17	440	^ / ⇈	^	⇈	^	!	!	47.5	7.1	137	O	O	O
Ford F-150 Lightning E	65	v	⇈	89	70 ①	320	^ / ⇈	!	⇈	^	!	!	49.0	4.3	144	S	S	S
Rivian R1T E	63	v	⇈	87	70 ①	314	^ / ^	⇊	^	^	^	^	52.5	3.8	135	S	S	S
Toyota Tundra 3.5T	61	v	^	71	17	540	^ / ⇈	^	^	!	!	v	48.0	6.3	140	S	S	O
Nissan Titan 5.6L	54	v	v	70	16	405	^ / !	⇈	^	!	!	!	49.5	6.7	131	S	S	S
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 5.3L	50	⇊	!	78	17	400	! / ⇈	^	^	!	!	!	49.5	6.9	136	S	O	O
Ford F-150 Hybrid 3.5T+H	45	⇊	^	79	20	600	^ / ⇈	^	⇈	!	!	v	48.0	6.3	141	S	S	O

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score,** which factors in **road-test results, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

⇊ v ! ^ ⇈ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

① Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

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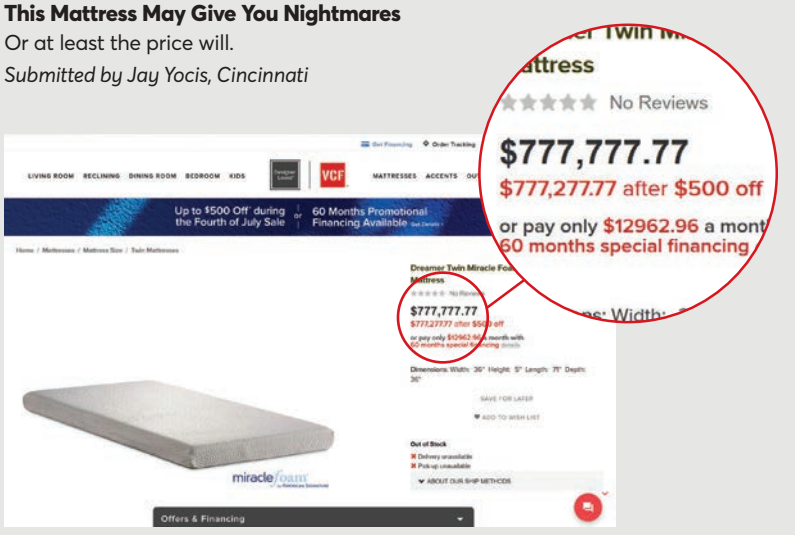
This Mattress May Give You Nightmares
Or at least the price will.
Submitted by Jay Yocis, Cincinnati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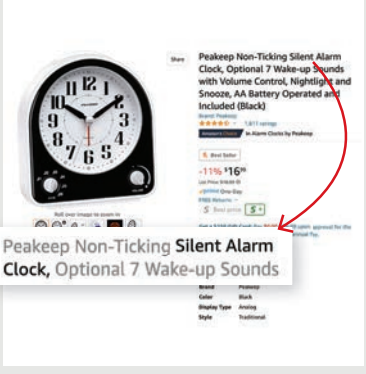

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Good luck with that if you take this deal.
Submitted by Kristi Wright, via email

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